

A SHORT HISTORY OF MALAYALAM LITERATURE

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Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker

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**Information & Public Relations Department
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FOREWORD

Literature of an ethnic group reflects the social, cultural and political milieu and wholesome life of that society they live in. And it is the responsibility of the government to undertake appropriate measures to make available an account of this literature to both the common readers and those who aspire to analyse and transform these levels of growth to other areas of human development. Strictly following this principle, we decided to reprint the book, *A Short History of Malayalam Literature* as its sixth edition, which was first published in 1977. The book tries to present the lengthy history of Malayalam literature in a precise form. So that the reader could get the facts in a nutshell, without consuming much of his valuable time.

The author, Sri. K. Ayyappa Panicker, a competent authority in the literary field, has added the contemporary footprints also in the latest edition. We thank him for his earnest endeavour in this regard.

The sixth edition of the book itself is its relevance. Hence we submit this new edition to the people who love letters.

Thiruvananthapuram
08 May 2006

K.C. Venu,
Director,
Information &
Public Relations Department

AUTHOR'S NOTE TO THE NEW EDITION

A Short History of Malayalam Literature was first published in 1977 on the occasion of the First World Malayalam Conference held at Trivandrum. Since then it has had many reprints, but no new edition as such. The present edition retains the original text with minor corrections and additions. An appendix has been specially added to cover the main developments in the period after Independence.

Writing on contemporaries is a difficult and risky enterprise. The omissions will be glaring, the errors will be numerous, and the opinions expressed may not please every one. The list of authors or texts mentioned may not be exhaustive. But the writer in all humility may crave the indulgence of all those who know better and pray for their goodwill.

Thiruvananthapuram
12 October 2005.

Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker

AUTHOR'S NOTE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

In this brief layman's account of the evolution of Malayalam literature over the past one thousand years, no attempt has been made to be exhaustive. Some authors and works had to be left out for want of space; and several authors briefly mentioned here deserve to be discussed in greater detail. The contemporary period has not been fully covered, the author felt that, among other things, it was not easy to see the works of this period in perspective and therefore to evaluate them objectively. These drawbacks are perhaps unavoidable in a venture of very limited scope like the present one. The author's main effort has been to discover the central tradition of our literature through the major works of different periods. He certainly welcomes suggestions, for change or addition, from interested readers, so that the necessary modifications can be made in the next edition. He also wishes to thank the authors of the books consulted which are listed at the end.

Thiruvananthapuram
29-12-97

Dr. K. Ayyappa Paniker

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Malayalam, the mother tongue of nearly thirty million Malayalis, ninety per cent of whom live in Kerala State in the south-west corner of India, belongs to the Dravidian family of languages. Like the speakers, the language also has been receptive to influences from abroad and tolerant of elements added from outside. Malayalam literature too reflects this spirit of accommodation and has over the centuries developed a tradition which, even while rooted in the locality, is truly universal in taste. It is remarkably free from the provincialisms and parochial prejudices that have bedevilled the literature of certain other areas. To its basic Dravidian stock have been added elements borrowed or adopted from non-Dravidian literatures such as Sanskrit, Arabic, French, Portuguese and English. The earliest of these associations was inevitably with Tamil. Sanskrit, however, accounts for the largest of the “foreign” influences, followed closely in recent times by English. The broad-based cosmopolitanism has indeed become a distinctive feature of Malayalam literature.

According to the most dependable evidence now available to us, Malayalam literature is at least a thousand years old. The language must certainly be older; but linguistic research has yet to discover unmistakable evidence to prove its antiquity. Historical accuracy has often been a problem since the records in most cases show no reference to the exact date of the composition. Legends and folklore have often taken the place of historical

facts and chronology has been consciously or unconsciously tampered with. Modern research on scientific lines, however, has gone a long way to explain the origin and early development of the language.

A comprehensive literary history of Kerala should take into account the works produced in the region not only in Malayalam language, but also in Tamil, beginning with the fourth century B.C. and continuing to the end of the first millennium A.D. It should also trace the evolution of the works in Sanskrit produced by writers in Kerala. The contribution of Kerala to Tamil literature which includes *Chilappathikaram* produced in the 2nd century A.D. should perhaps find its proper place in the history of Tamil literature just as Kerala's contribution to Sanskrit, which includes the works of Sankaracharya and Kulasekhara Alwar of the early 9th century A.D., should come within a history of Sanskrit literature. The contribution of Kerala writers to English and Hindi in recent years, in the same way, is part of the literatures in those languages. Since this book is primarily devoted to the evolution of literature in Malayalam, the political history and the history of the language as well as the literature written in other languages are not discussed here in detail.

The Poetry of the Earth

It is difficult to provide documentary evidence for the existence of the earliest literary works written in Malayalam. The folk-songs and ballads of popular origin have been orally transmitted from generation to generation, but the forms in which they survive today must be quite different from their original forms. Any sweeping generalizations based on their present day forms are bound to be wrong. However, it would not be wrong to think that in some of them at least one can find evidence of the earliest springs of poetic inspiration in Malayalam. A large number of these folk-songs are associated with various kinds of religious rituals dating back to primitive Dravidian and Pre-Aryan times. Among these are perhaps the songs recited by Pulluvars at the festivals in serpent groves and by Panars when they used to go from house to house waking the people up in the early hours of the morning. The intrusion of Aryan faith even into these primitive rituals has led to their total transformation in theme, diction and imagery. The secular

songs for popular entertainment and for agricultural operations have probably survived without serious damage. These are marked by a simplicity of structure and commitment to the problems of everyday life. Some of them relate to the tragedy and pathos of the poorer classes; others are marked by a sparkling sense of humour. One of the most widely popular of these tragic songs is in the form of a complaint voiced by the farm labourer who is detained by the landlord for long hours to do all kinds of chores in the manorial household.

The time is gone, the time is gone,
The water fowl
Is hopping away
Behind the screwpine.

When I went there
There was neither this nor that.

When I went there
They made me do the fence which was not there.

When I went there
They made me dig the pond which was not there.

When I went there
They made me thatch the unthatched roof.

For half a pint of toddy
They drive me to death,
For half a tender coconut
They drive me to death.

The time is gone, the time is gone
the water fowl
is hopping away
behind the screwpine.

Another of these folk-songs presents a young girl who is able to outwit the young man who slyly approaches her as she is walking across a paddy field. It is in the form of a dialogue. The young man asks her to move closer to him and take cover under his umbrella, but she parries his requests with witty evasions.

Who is going there along the causeway
With bangles on the arms?

Oh, it is only the slave girl
Of my lord of the farm.

Throw away those bangles girl,
And come under this umbrella.

This umbrella is just for a day,
But my bangles are for all my life.

Who is going there along the causeway
With palm-leaf rolls in the ears?

Oh, it is only the slave girl
Of my lord of the farm.

Throw away the palm-leaf rolls, girl,
And come under this umbrella.

This umbrella is just for a day,
But these palm-leaf rolls are for all my life.

Who is there going along the causeway
With silver anklets on the feet?

Oh, it is only the slave girl
Of my lord of the farm.

Throw away the silver anklets, girl,
And come under this umbrella.

This umbrella is just for a day,
But these anklets are for all my life.

Among the vocational songs are many which render an actual account of agricultural operations, especially the planting of seedlings and harvesting. The following song is sung by Pulayas who earn their living by working all the year round on the soil:

The rains have all come down,
The little fields are now wet,

The ploughing and tilling over,
The little seedlings have been scattered,
Omala, Chenthila, Mala,
 Little Kannamma, Kali, Karumpi
Chatha, Chadaya and all
 The Pulaya women have come.
They have come and lined up
 And portioned out the seedlings.
To move up the line in unison
 They get ready and bend down.
Kanna, the Pulaya girl then,
 She calls out to Omala and says
“You must sing a song
 Before you finish the planting and go”.
Then comes a parrot girl
 She perches on the tree and chirps.
The little Pulaya girl Omala
 Looks up at it and says:
“O, parrot girl, now tell me
 Why you have come here at all.”

Interspersed with beautiful choric refrains made up of meaningless vocables constituting *Vaythari* metres, these folk-songs have preserved for centuries the pristine musical traditions of Kerala. The Christians and Muslims, along with Brahmins and other upper classes, have also had their religious and social songs. Examples are the door-opening song of the Christians associated with marriage celebrations, coaxing the bridegroom to open the door of the bridal chamber, the famous *Mappila songs* and ballads with their lyrical lilt and fervour, the *Sanghakali songs* of the Brahmin theatre, the songs about Kali, used for *Thiyattu* and *Mudiyettu*, the boatsongs or *Vanchipattu* sung by choral groups to accompany spirited boat race activities and songs used for *Kalamezhuthu*, *Thira* and other kinds of ritualistic worship.

Among the ballads of a later period, we have the famous *Vatakkal Pattukal* (ballads of the north) and *Thekkan Pattukal* (ballads of the south). They cover a wide variety of themes ranging from the historical exploits of the legendary heroes of non-religious folk mythology to songs of lamentation and mourning. The ballads of the north are narratives full of dramatic tension: the main characters belong to the Nayar or Ezhava communities, and are distinguished for their valour, military skill and sense of honour. Family feuds often provide the background or foreground of these stories in verse. Odenan, Aromal, Unniyarcha, Komappan, Chandu, Kelu, Alikutty and Kannan are a few of the unforgettable characters who figure in these ballads. Aromal and Odenan are the most colourful of these folk heroes. The Tachcholi ballad which reveals the greatness of Odenan is a saga of heroism, violence, revenge, love and courage. Logan calls Odenan “the Robin Hood of North Malabar”. “In the popular ballad, he is stated to have been treacherously shot, but whether mortally or not is uncertain, by a Mappilla on returning to search for a dagger he had accidentally dropped in a duel in which he had discomfited his enemy”. The opening of the poem reveals some of the general characteristics of these ballads and conjures up the medieval world of family feuds and superstitions. (Translation by Logan).

To his squire Odayottidathil Kandasseri (Chappan)
said Tacholi Meppayil Kunhi Odennan,
“For the Lokanar Kavil Kavut,
Which day of ceremony has come and dawned
We to that temple must go”.
Tachcholi Meppayil Kunhi Odenan
His apparel he put on,
His sword and shield he took in his right and left
In front walked Kandasseri,
In the rear the nobleman Kunhi Odenan
Together proceeded in company
Said dear Kunhi Odenan
To his wife Kavile Chathoth Kunhichiru:
“Till I go and come
Don’t you go down the gate steps;

Do caress child Ambadi,
Give him milk when thirsty
And rice when hungry”.
So Tacholi Meppayil Kunhi Odenan
Took leave of Kavile Chathoth.

When Odenan reached Lokanar Kavvu, he found the place already “fenced with men on all four sides”. He took his seat under the banian tree. Mathilur Kurikkal and his twenty-two disciples arrived there then. Kurikkal was not pleased to see Odenan seated there. After an exchange of rancour and insult, the two men came to challenge each other.

When descending the steps,
The Kurikkal shouted loud and challenged:
“My good fellow, Tacholi Kunhi Odena!
If the tenth and eleventh of Kumbham shall come,
If God will spare my life,
I pledge my word to be at Ponnayat.
There under the banian tree
In single combat could we test our supremacy.
That day let us meet again!”
Thus the Kurikkal declared the war,
In the midst of the ten thousand,
And proceeded back on his way.
The sight-seers trembled
At this throwing down and taking up the gauntlet.
A stillness prevailed like that after a heavy rain.
A panic spread
Over all assembled.

Odenan accepted the challenge and in spite of warnings went to the appointed place on the appointed day. The poetic excellence of this ballad consists not only in the narrative vigour but also in the acuteness of observation displayed by the anonymous writer. Odenan’s dinner is described with scrupulous attention to detail:

A kadali plantain leaf was spread
His sister Tachcholi Unichira
Served him the dinner.
Fine lily-white rice,
A large quantity of pure ghee,
And eleven kinds of vegetable curries.
He fed himself sumptuously on all these
And washed his hands and mouth after it.
He then sat in the south verandah.
Kandasseri Chappan, his squire,
Served him betel to chew.

The description of Odenan's appearance as he set out is even better than this;

He wore God-of-serpent's head ear-ring in ears,
Combed down his hair,
And wore a flower of gold over the crown,
A silk cloth round the loins,
A gold girdle over it,
Gold rings in four fingers,
A bracelet worked in with scenes
From Ramayanam and Bharatam
High up on his right arm,
A gold-handled sword in his right hand,
And a tiger-fighting shield in his left hand.
When coming out thus dressed, he looked
Like melted gold of ten and a half touch!
Like the rising sun in the east!
Like the setting moon in the west!

Among the ballads of the south, one of the most powerful is the *Iravikkuttipillai Battle*, also called "The Battle of Kaniyamkulam". The dialogue between the distinguished warrior Iravikkuttipillai and his wife, the latter asking her husband not to proceed to battle because she had seen bad dreams about its dire consequences, is particularly touching. Another equally

arresting passage is the description of how the women celebrated the occasion of the hero's glorious march to the battle field in full array. The southern songs have a greater admixture of Tamil words. *Ramakatha Pattu*, which is perhaps the most elaborate and most magnificent of these southern poems, is not a ballad but a genuine folk epic. Ayyappilli Asan, the author of this massive epic on the theme of Ramayana, is believed to have lived in the 15th century A.D. But the language and literary style point to a folk bias. Born near Kovalam to the south of Thiruvananthapuram, Asan was a master of Tamil too; his language thus remains very close to Tamil. There are numerous passages in *Ramakatha Pattu* which have a highly lyrical quality and an unmatched delicacy of imagination.

The folk poetry of Kerala is still an unspent force. It has always shown greater vigour and vitality than the poetry of the elite. The metrical richness of Malayalam folk poetry, too, is immense. It reflects the fundamentally musical approach to poetry that manifests itself in Malayalam literature. A predominant and all-pervasive sense of rhythm seems to be so characteristic a feature of Kerala culture. It might even be said that the perennial appeal of the *Pattu* school of poetry is mainly due to the inexhaustible melodic potentiality of its metrical structure. The vitality of the folk tradition in historical times is demonstrated by the *Mappila Pattukal* (Moplah songs) which have not only enriched the metrical resources of the language but put special emphasis on vira and sringara (the heroic and the erotic). The Arabi-Malayalam language used in these Moplah songs establishes the quaint beauty of their melodies. In the same way the *Idanadan Pattu*, a ballad with a Pulaya hero, adds to the variety of folk poetry in Malayalam.

Ramacharitam

The evidence for the beginning of conscious literary creation in Malayalam is to be found in *Ramacharitam*, written in the 12th century and believed to be the oldest extant classic in Malayalam (some scholars have assigned it to the 14th century). The language represented here is an early form of Malayalam which appears to be almost indistinguishable from Tamil,

except perhaps for a linguist. *Ramacharitam* is the earliest of the many poetic versions of the story of Ramayana that have appeared in Malayalam. The work is thus important from the linguistic as well as the literary point of view. Ulloor Parameswara Iyer, who was the first to bring to light long excerpts from this poem, holds the view that it was written by Sri Vira Rama Varma who ruled over Travancore from 1195 to 1208. Scholars differ on whether the language of *Ramacharitam* represents the literary dialect or the spoken dialect of Malayalam of that period.

Ramacharitam is also taken to be the greatest work belonging to the *Pattu* school. Cheeraman, the author, as his name is given in the poem itself, has adapted to suit a Dravidian sensibility, a story which is unmistakably of Aryan origin. The work retells the story of Ramayana and the author tries to follow Valmiki in all essential details. However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that one could read the work as an original and independent poem in which the story is told with remarkable ease, maturity and perfect craftsmanship. It rises far above the level of ordinary folk poetry in its literary sophistication. Even the stanzas of invocation in section one show great skill not only in condensing a whole series of events in one context but also in intoning the emotion or *bhava* in a concentrated form. Here is a passage, for example.

So difficult it is for me to narrate
how the son of Vayu hugged grief for a night
seeking Maithili, the long-eyed one,
crossing the billowy sea with perfect skill,
as the monkeys went about in all directions
at the orders of their king who had become friends
with Rama, while he was wandering along the route
on which, before the rainy months came,
the Rakshasa chief had disappeared with Sita.

The focus is on Hanuman and the context is clearly specified so that the reference to the night of grief spells out the central *bhava*. It also marks out the part of the Ramayana story which is going to be narrated in the present work. In the 1814 verses grouped into 164 sections the poet

tries to tell in a dramatic style the war between Rama and Ravana. Thus, although the work is called *Ramacharitam*, it deals with only the Battle Canto (*Yudha Kanda*) of Ramayana. The earlier episodes in Rama's life are told by means of retrospective narration. The scenes of battle are described with verve and vigour. Physical prowess is fully appreciated by the poet. Some scholars have argued that this poem was composed in order to inspire the soldiers in the discharge of their duty. But there are other emotions also invoked in the poem. *Bhakti* or piety is dominant in many passages since the author presents Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu. In this, as in many other aspects, it is likely that the author was influenced by writers like Kambar. There is no doubt that in the depiction of both the heroic and the pathetic or tragic, the poet shows extreme delicacy of touch and propriety. Here is Mandodari's lament as Ravana, her lord, lies killed in battle.

O King, lying asleep on this battle ground
in royal regalia, kindly rise,
as we of the weaker sex, and I, your bondmaid,
who used to make you utter elixir-like words,
weep, while speaking brave words to endure this,
so that our lotus eyes fill with tears blurring the sight.

The Beginning of Prose

There is no literary work in prose, matching in quality with *Ramacharitam* of the same period. The earliest pieces of prose in existence are of a documentary nature, with no touch of imagination. The Attoor copper plate of Vira Udaya Marthanda Varma of Venad dated 1251 is, according to Ulloor, the earliest document, wholly in Malayalam proper. But *Bhasha Kautaliyam*, a Malayalam translation of Kautalya's *Artha Sastra*, is contemporaneous with *Ramacharitham* and illustrates the use of prose for imaginative purposes as well. The writer reveals a remarkable sense of style. The alternation between short and long sentences produces a sense of rhythm without destroying the straight-forwardness of the writing. Here is a passage describing rainfall;

Hereinafter types of clouds that rain in Sushama year are described. There are three types of clouds that rain continuously for seven days. There are eighty types of clouds which shower minute drops. Sixty are the types of clouds that appear but do no rain at all. All these kinds of rain will be good for all seeds and plants.

Manipravalam

While the *Pattu* School flourished among certain sections of the society, the literature of the elite was composed in the curious mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam which is referred to as *Manipravalam*, *mani* meaning ruby (Malayalam) and *pravalam* meaning coral (Sanskrit) *Lilathilakam*, a work on grammar and rhetoric, written in the last quarter of the 14th century discusses the relationship between *Manipravalam* and *pattu* as poetic forms. It lays special emphasis on the types of words that blend harmoniously. It points out that the rules of Sanskrit prosody should be followed in *Manipravalam* poetry. This particular school of poetry was patronized by the upper classes, especially the Nambudiris. It is also to be remembered that the composition of this dialect also reflects the way Aryan and Dravidian cultures were moving towards a synthesis. Dramatic performances given in *Koothampalams*, known by the names of *Koothu* and *Koodiyattom*, often used Sanskrit and Malayalam. In *Koodiyattom*, the clown (*vidooshaka*) is allowed to use Malayalam while the hero recites slokas in Sanskrit. Tholan, a legendary court poet in the period of the Kulasekhara kings, is believed to have started this practice. The language of *Kramadeepikas* and *Attaprakarams*, which lay down the rules and regulations for these dramatic performances, is considerably influenced by the composite literary dialect of *Manipravalam*.

Early Manipravalam Works

The earliest of these works in the *Manipravalam* school is *Vaisika Tantram* written in the 13th century. It is fairly typical of the works that appealed to the upper class reading public of those days. It contains about 200 quatrains in Sanskrit metres and is in the form of professional advice

given to a prostitute or courtesan by her mother. These instructions are of a practical nature calculated to please the pampered tastes of a leisured class. But each quatran is composed with care and due weight is given to the rules of rhetoric. For instance the mother tells the daughter, who is to get ready for the family vocation as a courtesan, that “old age is a sea to be crossed by means of the wealth earned during one’s youth”. Several quatrains of this type are quoted in *Lilathilakam* by way of illustration for the several rules of grammar and rhetoric. An example may be quoted here.

All breezes are not breezes. The real breeze is the one
That bathes in the nearby river, dances among the growing
coconut trees,
Caresses the uniquely beautiful body of mistress Rohini
And comes in kindness to thrill me by blowing over me.

Perhaps the most representative of these early Manipravalam works are the tales of courtesans (*Achi Charitams*) and the Message Poems (*Sandesa Kavyas*).

The Early Champoos

Unniyachi Charitam, *Unnichiruthevi Charitam* and *Unniyadi Charitam* are examples of the former type which is known by the name *champoo*, written in close imitation of the champoos in Sanskrit. The Padya or “verse” portion is in Sanskrit metres and the Gadya or “prose” portion is mostly in Dravidian metres. Unniyachi is the heroine of *Unniyachi Charitam* and the poem is concerned with a *Gandharva*’s love for her. There are plenty of passages of ornate description of either the heroine’s charms or the splendour of the town or market place visited by her. The authorship is unknown. In *Unnichiruthevi Charitham*, it is Indra, the King of the Gods, who is smitten by a passion for the heroine and descends on the earth to visit her. In the course of the elaborate description of things seen by Indra, we get passages which throw light on the manners and morals of the upper class society of its time. Only a portion of the work is

now available to us. *Unniyadi Charitam*, which also exists in a fragmented form, is supposed to be written by Damodara Chakkiar. Against the backdrop of a complicated story involving generations of Gandharvas, there emerges the story of Unniyadi, the heroine. The moon god happens to hear wonderful music wafted into the sky and sends his attendant Suvakan to find out its source. The poem contains the description of all that Suvakan sees on the earth, especially in places like Thrissur, Mahodayapuram and Kayamkulam.

Sandesa Kavyas

It is natural that *Manipravalam* looked to Sanskrit for models of literary works. The Sandesa Kavyas are an important poetic genre in Sanskrit, and on the model of Kalidasa's *Meghadoot* and Lakshmidasa's *Sukasandesa*, a number of message poems came to be written first in *Manipravalam* and later in pure Malayalam. The best of these *sandesas* is perhaps *Unnuneelisanandesam* written in the 14th century. Unnuneeli is the heroine, and she and her lover live in Kaduthuruthi. One night as they are asleep, a fairy (*Yakshi*) carries him away and goes south. He wakes up by the time they reach Thiruvananthapuram and frees himself from the hold of the fairy. He visits Sri Padmanabha Temple and meeting Aditya Varma, a junior prince of Kollam there, engages him as a messenger to carry his news to his beloved in Kaduthuruthi. In part one, as usual, the poet describes the route to Kaduthuruthi, for the benefit of the messenger as well as the readers. In part two the actual message is described and entrusted to the messenger. The poem is a treasure house of information relating to the conditions of life in Kerala in the fourteenth century. In addition, it contains several quatrains of unexceptionable beauty, both in thought and in verbal felicity. In two hundred and forty stanzas, with breath-taking eroticism and exquisite imagery, this message poem reaches the high watermark of early *Manipravalam* poetry. It combines extreme sophistication and complexity in its poetic craft with remarkable naturalness and authenticity in its theme and thought.

The Niranam Poets

While the *Manipravala* poetry flourished as a diversion from the mainstream, the tradition set up by Cheeraman of *Ramacharitam* and the more enlightened among the anonymous folk poets was resumed and replenished by three writers commonly referred to as Niranam poets. The *Bhakti* school was thus revived, and in the place of the excessive sensuality and eroticism of the *Manipravala* poets, the seriousness of the poetic vocation was reasserted by them. It is believed that they all belonged to the same Kannassa family and that Madhava Panikkar and Sankara Panikkar were the uncles of Rama Panikkar, the youngest of the three. They lived between 1350 and 1450 A.D. and made valuable contribution to the *Pattu* school. Madhava Panikkar wrote a condensed Malayalam translation of Bhagavad Gita, perhaps the first translation of the classic into any modern Indian language. Sankara Panikkars's main work is *Bharatamala*, a masterly condensation of Mahabharatam, is also the first major work of its kind in Malayalam. The greatest of the three is of course Rama Panikkar, the author of *Ramayanam*, *Bharatam*, *Bhagavatam* and *Sivarathri Mahatmyam*. *Kannassa Ramayanam* and *Kannassa Bharatam* are the most important of these Niranam works. Rama Panikkar's *Ramayanam* is an important link between Cherraman's *Ramacharitam*, Ayyappilli Asan's *Ramakathapattu* and Ezhuthachan's *Adhyatma Ramayanam*. They bear eloquent testimony to the continuing popularity of the *Ramayana* story in Kerala. Together they constitute the strong bulwark of the *Bhakti* movement which enable the Malayalis to withstand and resist the onslaught of foreign cultures. The Dravidianization of Aryan mythology and philosophy was their joint achievement, coming in the wake of the heroic effort of Sankaracharya, who wrote only in Sanskrit. The central native tradition of Malayalam poetry has its most significant watershed in the works of the Niranam poets. Their success led to the gradual replacement of the *Manipravala* cult of worldliness and sensual revelry by an indigenous poetics of high seriousness. One step forward from the Niranam poets will take us to Cherusseri and his *Krishnagatha*, two steps together will land us in the company of Kerala's greatest poet *Thunchathu Ezhuthachan*. The centrality of Niranam Rama Panikkar is of vital concern to any conscientious literary historian of

Malayalam. The subordination of the descriptive and the narrative elements to the controlling theme is a feature of Rama Panikkar's poetic style. The killing of Thataka in the Balakanda of *Kannassa Ramayanam* is disposed of in one verse which helps to preserve the dramatic tension of the action.

Came she like a gigantic blue cloud,
shouting with frightening fury,
Wearing garlands of blood-dripping intestines
beating her crescent-white tusks,
But the leader of mankind woke up to anger
and smashing her magic witchcraft
With arrows shot, saluted the rishi
and killed her at his command.

Lakshmana's furious threat to Tara when Sugriva failed to expedite the quest for Sita is another eloquent example.

Tara, your husband does not consider
what is good and what is bad without delay
He had said, with the approach of summer
he would search for Devi without fail.
We waited so long upon that word
and then he has forgotten all that
Blind and stupid with drunkenness,
knowing neither day or night.

Ulloor has said that Rama Panikkar holds the same position in Malayalam literature that Spenser has in English literature. His command over complex rhythms, his attention to sensuous, concrete details, his power of phrasing and perfect control over mythological material seem to lend support to this view.

The Later Champoos

The 15th century A.D. saw two paralleled movements in Malayalam literature: one spearheaded by the *Manipravala* works

especially the Champoos, mixing verse and prose, and continuing the trend of the earlier Champoos at least in part, and the other emanating from the *pattu* school and adumbrated in Cherusseri's magnum opus, the *Krishnagatha* (Song of Krishna). As the elitist *Manipravala Champoo* school is going to disappear later in the next century, it may be discussed first. The language of the later *Champoos* reads more like modern Malayalam than that of the earlier *Champoos* and *Sandesakavyas*. Perhaps, it can also be said that there is an improvement in poetic quality and craftsmanship too. The greatest *Manipravala Champoos* of the 15th century is Punam Nambudiri's *Ramayanam*, a close rival to Mahishamangalam's of the 17th century. It is believed that Punam was responsible for using Puranic themes and episodes in *Champoos* for the first time, unlike the 14th century *Champoos* which were tales of the courtesans.

The later *Champoos* came to be used for dramatic oral narration by performing artists in their *Koothu* and *Patakam*. Their diction, like their themes, seems to be more refined than that of the earlier *Champoos*, showing a self-conscious effort on the part of their authors. *Ramayanam Champoo* consists of 20 *Prabandhas* viz., Ravana's birth, Rama's incarnation, the killing of Thataka, the deliverance of Ahalya, the marriage of Sita, the triumph over Parasurama, the foiled coronation, the killing of Khara, the treaty with Sugriva, the killing of Bali, the entry into the garden, the scene of the ring, the entry into Lanka, the killing of Ravana, the ordeal by fire, the entry into Ayodhya, the coronation, the repudiation of Sita, The *Aswamedha* and the *Swargarohana*.

A recurring feature of some of these *Champoos* is that several passages are common to many of them. It would appear as though the performing artists, the Chakyars or the Nambiars, appropriated passages from other *Champoos* and introduced them into any given *Champoo* chosen for presentation. A remarkable feature of *Ramayanam Champoo* is the sense of humour that sparkles in many passages. Punam also wrote a *Bharatam Champoo*. There are also many others, the authorship of which is ascribed to him.

Mahishamangalam (or Mazhamangalam) Narayanan Nambudiri is the author of some of the best Champoos of all time. The most widely known of these is *Naishadham* followed by *Rajaratnavaliyam* and *Kodia Viraham*. Like Punam, Mahishamangalam also revels in humour. This aspect of the work must have especially appealed to the performing artists who used the text for public performance. It may be this sense of the comic that eventually percolated into the *Thullal* poems of Kunchan Nambiar, centuries later.

Chandrotsavam

Chandrotsavam, a long narrative poem written in *Manipravala* on the model of the *Kavyas* in Sanskrit, should also be mentioned here. The authorship is unknown. A shy intrusion of romantic sensibility may be detected in parts of this poem. There are also lines which seem to strike an ironic note. Some scholars consider it a work of satire. Hyperbolie was a regular feature of *Champoo* literature, but to our taste today, it might look like conscious exaggeration to provoke ridicule and laughter.

The story of *Manipravala* poetry will remain incomplete, unless the *Muktakas* or single quatrains are also touched upon. Some of them are exquisite word pictures. Some have a lyrical perfection rarely equalled by later lyricists.

Cherusseri's Krishnagatha

If the *Champoos* represents the aesthetic tastes of the scholarly and sophisticated readership, the average readers without much grounding in Sanskrit had their favourite poems and poets in the so-called Pattu school. The folk poems as well as *Ramacharitam* and *Niranam* works helped to preserve the proletarian tastes. The poetics of the *Pattu* school find a further confirmation in the celebrated and popular Song of Krishna (*Krishnagatha*) by Cherusseri Nambudiri. With the writing of *Krishnagatha*, the validity of the use of spoken Malayalam for literary purposes receives its ultimate

justification. Unlike the language of *Ramacharitam* and the works of the Niranam poets, the language of *Krishnagatha* marks the culmination of a stage of evolution. Cherusseri excels by the simplicity and limpidness of his diction and imagery. *Krishnagatha* is an epic in Malayalam written in a popular Dravidian metre which has evolved from a folk metre. It does not have the tightness and characteristics of either *Ramacharitam* or *Kannassa Ramayanam*. There are also local touches in an abundant measure. Sweetness and light, rather than vigour or high seriousness, is Cherusseri's forte. It arises partly from his localizing devices. There is also an entrancing freshness about his description of domestic life. The naturalness and ease of his flowing lines also accounts for Cherusseri's popularity.

Cherusseri belonged to Kolathunad in northern Kerala. The consensus among scholars is that he lived and wrote in the 15th century A.D. There is some dispute about the author's name and his identity. Some scholars are of opinion that he was the same as the Punam Nambudiri of the *Champoos*. The difference between the style of *Krishnagatha* and that of any of the *Champoos* should point to the impossibility of this identification. Even a casual reading of the work will convince one of the uniqueness of its style. Later poets have learned a lot from him, but no one can successfully imitate him. The distinctive Cherusseri stamp is deeply marked on every line of his poem. His use of figures of speech, his pleasant diction and his mastery over the metrical structure (especially the pause and the caesura) are borne out by almost any part of the poem. Here is an example, a description of Poothana's arrival in Ampadi with the intention of causing baby Krishna's death through milk poisoning.

As she saw the place from a distance
She went close and shyly sneaked in
Even as the python stealthily goes
Close to the perch of the king of birds.

She stood there for a while
Watching the darling's charming face,
As though she waited in impatience
Why the lord of death had not come.

She went forward and stood touching
That flower-soft body, softer than tender leaves,
As if touching real fire
Taking it for a jewel.

Then she picked up the darling child
Like taking a serpent for a rope.

In this string of similes the poet shows both insight and wit; the figures anticipate her future course. Here is an eloquent picture of the pitiful position in which she puts herself unknowingly. *Bhakthi*, *Vatsalyam* (love of children etc.) *Karuna*, *Sringara*; these are the dominant moods in Cherusseri's poetry.

The Growth of Prose

The evolution of prose literature in the early centuries was a very slow process. In the wake of *Bhashakautaliyam* several translations began to appear in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The prose of *Attaprakarams* was meant to aid the *Chakiyars* in learning the art of *Koodiyattom*, *Doothavakyam* (14th century A.D.) is one of the earliest of these free renderings which reveals a kind of style that is suited for elaborate oral narration. The long, rolling, sonorous sentences are interspersed with pieces of dialogue which contain spoken forms. Fifteenth century Malayalam prose is represented by *Brahmanda Puranam*, a summary of the original in Sanskrit. The prose here is more free from Sanskrit influence than in *Doothavakyam*. The syntax is less cumbersome and the units are presented in the sequential order without resorting to specific co-ordination or subordination. There are, however, numerous Tamil and Sanskrit expressions scattered here and there. These give a stylized effect to the prose. A large number of prose works appeared during this period, most of which are either narrative based on puranas and religious works in Sanskrit or commentaries on similar works. With the starting of the first printing presses in the Sixteenth century by Christian missionaries, prose literature received a great boost.

Thunchathu Ezhuthachan

Malayalam literature passed through a tremendous process of development in the 15th and 16th centuries. Cherusseri's *Krishnagatha* bore witness to the evolution of modern Malayalam language as a proper medium for serious poetic communication. Alongside this, there flourished numerous Sanskrit poets who were very active during this period. The greatest of them was Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri, the author of *Narayaneeyam*. The Manipravala poets were no less active, as is shown by a series of *Champoos* and *Kavyas* and single quatrains produced in the period, the greatest monument of which is perhaps the *Naishadham Champoo*. But the most significant development of the time took place in the field of Malayalam poetry.

Thunchathu Ezhuthachan, the greatest Malayalam poet of all time, wrote his two great epics *Adhyatma Ramayanam* and *Srimahabharatam* and two shorter pieces, *Irupathinalu Vrittam* and *Harinama Kirtanam* and thereby revolutionized Malayalam language and literature at once. He is rightly regarded as the maker of modern Malayalam and the father of Malayalam poetry. The study of Malayalam should properly begin with the acquisition of the skill to read Ezhuthachan's *Ramayanam* with fluency. It was in his works that the Sanskrit and Dravidian streams in our language as well as literature achieved a proper synthesis.

The evolution of modern Malayalam becomes complete with his judicious fusion of the disparate elements. In his diction there is no violation of euphony. Ezhuthachan's mind and ear went together in the selections and ordering of phonological and morphological units. The *Kilippattu* form he adopted in *Ramayanam* and *Bharatam* may be a pointer to his recognition of the importance of sound effect in poetry. It enabled him to combine fluency with elegance, spontaneity with complexity, naturalness with depth of meaning and simplicity with high seriousness. His choice of classical Dravidian metres in preference to both the classical Aryan metres and the Dravidian-based folk metres reveals his concern for striking a balance in most of his endeavours. Ezhuthachan is the greatest spokesman of the *Bhakti*

movement in Malayalam but he is more than a writer of devotional hymns. It is possible to think of him primarily as a poet imbued with a sense of mission, but not willing to fritter away his energies on negative projects like castigating any section or community.

Ezhuthachan is the greatest synthesizer Kerala has ever seen. A non-Brahmin himself, who studied the Vedas and Upanishads without prior priestly sanction, he was yet devoted to the real Brahmins and always revealed a sublime sense of humility. Critics have sometimes, in their overenthusiasm and admiration for the poet, pointed out that whenever he has to mention Rama or Krishna, he goes into raptures and produces a string of the Lord's names. If this is shown as an inability on the part of the poet to decide what is proper and what is improper in a given situation, it would only mean denigrating Ezhuthachan as a poet. Ezhuthachan is a master of *auchitya* or the quality of decorum in writing. It could easily be seen that the intrusion of his personal *bhakti* is not at the expense of aesthetic propriety. The very fact that he chose *Adhyatma Ramayana* and not *Valmiki Ramayana* as his model, shows that devotional effusions are automatically justified in his telling of the story of Rama. *Bhakti* becomes the *Sthayibhava* and it would have been improper if he narrated the story merely as an account of events without any transcendental significance.

That Ezhuthachan is not a mere translator is granted by all critics and scholars. In fact he follows the earlier Kerala writers in freely elaborating or condensing the original as he thinks proper. The celebration of this freedom gained in poetic creation is what enlivens and ennobles the hymns interspersed in his works. There seems to be another superstition among some critics that his *Bharatam* is more poetic than *Ramayanam*. This again arises from the misconception that devotion is an anachronism in poetry. In Ezhuthachan's time there was no dissociation of religious sensibility and devotion and spirituality could always go together. His *Bharatam* is a later work, a more mature work but its artistic greatness does not depend on the exclusion of *bhakti* in it. As a matter of fact his *Bharatam* is as much imbued with religious devotion as his *Ramayanam*. The differences are perfectly consistent with the change of subject matter and the period of composition.

The *bhaktivadi* critics who praise *Ramayanam* purely as a devotional work are unconsciously belittling Ezhuthachan. His greatness as a poet consists in the appropriateness of the form he chose and the language he used for what he wanted to present to the people of his time as well as of later times.

The transition from Cherrusseri to Ezhuthachan marks the triumph of modernism over medievalism. This is very much in evidence in the selfrestraint with which Ezhuthachan resorts to the use of figures of speech. There is an urbanity and refinement in his portrayal of Ravana and Duryodhana. He was able to achieve the perfect integration of the literary and the spiritual; one was not sacrificed for the sake of the other, for he knew, that would spoil both. This liberalism enabled Ezhuthachan to excel his predecessors in the presentation of the different *rasas* and *bhavas*. Some passages will illustrate this wonderful versatility. Here is Gandhari's lament on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

“My child, my son, Duryodhana!
Why have you thrown away
Your golden crown and jewels
And the pomp and pride of the king of the Gods
And all the show of splendour and prowess
Thus deserting me and your dear father
All so suddenly? My heart breaks at this sight.

Are you, who used to let in a silken bed,
Now lying lifeless in a pool of blood?
Maruti in great anger has smashed
Your leg and killed you thus
I cannot bear to see this, alas!”
So Gandhari ran and fell and rolled around
Then fainted and woke up and again
Cried in great grief and began to say . . .

He is most eloquent when he comes to praise Rama or Krishna. The visual power of the following description of Krishna in the thick of the battle is indeed marvellous.

The colourful peacock feathers fixed in a row
And brought together and tied up on the top
With the heavy tresses so like dark clouds,
The jewelled diadem with its glitter and glow,
The dangling little curls on the forehead,
The tiny particles of dust on them,
The tilak too moist with sweat,
The beauty of the brows that keep moving
To create, protect and destroy the world,
The eyes that reflect the changing sentiments
With pity and compassion for the lowly and
Anger towards the cruel and the wily,
Love for the lovely, wonder at the squabble,
Laughter for the stupid, terror for the foes,
The cheeks that reflect the jewelled ear-rings,
The lotus face, the nose with beads of sweat,
The glowing smile and the lovely lips,
Garlands swaying on the breast
Made of tulsi and lotus and tender leaves,
Strings of rubies and *Kaustubha* jewel
Around the neck, the whip in hand
The breast smeared with *kumkum*,
The bright yellow clothes, the anklets,
The twin lotus feet, as in my heart,
So saw I clearly in the chariot to my joy.

The choice of the metres in each of the six cantos of *Adhyatma Ramayanam* is itself an unmistakable indication of Ezhuthachan's native sense of the cultural moorings of his people. Keka for *Balakandam*, *Kakali* for *Ayodhya*, *Keka* again for Aranya followed by *Kakali* for *Kishkindha*, with a sudden change over to *Kalakanchi* in *Sundarakanda* and return to *Kakali* for the *Yudhakanda*. The changes in the tempo are clearly marked in these variations. The purely narrative portions have an even flow which is never allowed to drag. The slow-motion unfolding of beauty at close

quarters is often rendered in appropriate metrical pattern as in the leisurely description of the childhood of Rama and his three brothers. Hanuman's leap to Lanka and his dangerous pranks there, are rendered in passages marked by a quicker tempo. The intimacy one feels in reading Ezhuthachan is accounted for by the efficient handling of the linguistic resources.

With his absolute sincerity, his adept skill in the use of language, his total dedication to poetry and religion, his disarming humility, Ezhuthachan was able to create and establish once and for all a language, a literature, a culture and a people. In later times, whenever there was a deviation or distortion in the cultural trend, the return to the central native tradition was facilitated by a true recognition and fresh realization of what Ezhuthachan had done and had stood for. He is thus a magnificent symbol or a great cultural monument.

Poonthanam Nambudiri

It there ever was another writer who could be Ezhuthachan's equal in *bhakti*, if not in poetic power, it was Poonthanam Nambudiri, a contemporary of Melpathur Bhattathiri and possibly of Ezhuthachan himself. His chief poems in Malayalam are *Bhasha Karnamritam*, *Kumaraharanam* or *Santanagopalam Pana* and *Jnanappana*. The first of these is a devotional work intended to create *Krishnabhakti* in the readers. The second is a touching narrative in very simple and straight-forward language and fast moving verse. It tells the story of a Brahmin father who lost all his children and sought the help of the Pandava prince Arjuna. Arjuna proudly offered to help him preserve his next child alive, but he was unable to keep his word. The Brahmin abuses Arjuna to his great anguish and in his wounded pride he decides to commit suicide by leaping into flames. Krishna out of love for Arjuna, intervenes at the last moment and takes him to Vaikunta from where they recover all the lost children of the Brahmin. Krishna's infinite love for his devotees is thus the central theme, but the poem also makes its appeal because of its down-to-earth realism and unmistakable touch of authenticity.

Jnanappana or the Song of Divine Wisdom is a veritable storehouse of transcendental knowledge which is firmly rooted in the experiences of this world. In a language, absolutely free from regionalism and dialectal influences, unadorned with excessive rhetorical features, through a series of concrete pictures taken from contemporary life, the poet is able to drive home his perception of the short lived nature of the ephemeral aspects of life. His religious meditations flow uncluttered and unencumbered with irrelevant matter.

Is there scarcity of the Lord's name?
Or has fear of hell declined?
Is there life without use of tongues?
Have we escaped from mortality?
Alas, alas, without reflection
We roast and eat our life in vain.
After how many lifetimes of labour
We happened to be born here by luck!
How many lifetimes spent in water,
How many lifetimes lived like trees,
How many lifetimes as beasts, as cattle
Ere we could be born as men?
After so much hard labour
We fell into our mother's womb,
Ten months have been spent in the womb,
Ten or twelve years spent as a child too
And the rest of the time not knowing ourselves
We spent in self-centred vainglory.

A large number of hymns and prayer songs which are still popular have been attributed to Poonthanam.

The Performing Arts

The sixteenth century also saw the writing of some dramatic works in *Manipravalam* and pure Malayalam, *Bharatavakyam*, often described as a choral narration, is a work in *Manipravalam* which was used for stage performance. The authorship is uncertain, but the work seems to have been

staged several times. It is a comedy with a large dose of farce in it. It may be regarded as the first *roopakam* in which Malayalam is combined with Sanskrit to present in a visual form, a story based on Kerala society, centring round a few characters such as a Nambudiri (Apphan), his Nayar wife, his manager (Ilayathu) and the children's tutor (Pisharoti).

Margamkali was the form of ritual and entertainment among the Syrian Christians corresponding to the *Sanghakali* of the Brahmins. *Margamkalippattu* is the song for this performance depicting the story of St. Thomas, the Apostle. This was one of the numerous pieces of Christian literature that must have gained currency in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Attakkatha

The main development in the cultural field in Kerala in the 17th century was the growth of a new form of visual art called *Attam* or *Kathakali*, which brought into being a new genre of poetry called *Attakkatha* consisting of the libretto used for a *Kathakali* performance. *Gitagovinda*, a work in Sanskrit by the Oriya poet of the 12th century, Jayadeva provided inspiration to Manaveda Raja of Kozhikode to set up a troupe to perform a dance-drama depicting the life of Krishna in eight parts. This *Krisnanattam* was the model before the prince of Kottarakkara who invented *Ramanattom* to put on stage the story of *Ramayana* also in eight parts. *Koodiyattom* was classical Sanskrit drama patronized by the elite class, *Padayani* or *Kolamthullal* was popular among the lower classes. In between there flourished various forms of ritualistic drama like *Mudiyettu*, *Thiyyattu*, *Kalam Ezhuthu Pattu*, *Teyyam* and *Thira*. The new art developed by Kottarakkara Tampuran appeared to combine the features of both. The evolution of *Kathakali* must have been a slow process and did not reach a final stage in the time of Kottarakkara Tampuran. The literature of *Kathakali* also came to develop its special features over the centuries.

The *Ramayana* plays of Kottarakkara Tampuran are not distinguished by literary excellence. However, his farsightedness is clearly revealed in the structure he set up for this new genre. The narrative

framework of an *attakatha* consists of quatrains in Sanskrit metres where the diction also is heavily Sanskritised, the dialogue part, however, is made up of *padas* which can be set to *raga* and *tala* and have to be rendered by means of gestures and body movements by the actors while being sung by the musicians from behind. The two-part structure is perhaps modelled on the *Champoos*. To judge an *Attakatha* solely on the basis of literary criteria would be unjust. It is a composite art and the words of the text are only a pretext for the visual representation. Even the selection and arrangement of words and lines will be guided by considerations of stage production. The words must yield to representation through gestures, they must lend themselves to musical rendering and if possible respond in sympathy to the instrumental music that accompanies their recitation. The stories are usually well-known to the audience, being mostly taken from the *Puranas*. The success of the performance depends on the degree of synchronization achieved by the actors, vocalists, instrumentalists and other helpers. The style of production has a definite bearing on the literature of *Kathakali*. Kottarakara's *attakkathas* are better on the stage than in the library, a silent reading may even irritate the reader. However, there are passages in some of these plays, which could be appreciated as literature, if one could simultaneously visualize the gestural rendering also. The last words of Bali to Rama in *Balivadham*, after the monkey king is mortally wounded in battle, are quite powerful.

King Raghava, please listen to my words
Finding it difficult to kill me in a straight fight
You had to hide yourself and cheat me.
That is no good. If you met me straight
I would have killed you, brave one! ere now.
In my heart I think you were born amiss
Although you are the son of good Dasaratha.
Brave people do not resort to cheating
You did this to me because you are a very small man.
Tara had warned me, but rejecting her warning
I came here to fight and got killed by you.
Is a monkey's flesh eatable?

The skin, too, is useless,, O jewel among men!
I who live in the forest never did
Anything untoward in your city.

This may sound conventional outside the context of a *Kathakali*, but the conventionality may not be felt when action accompanies the words. Nevertheless it has to be conceded that Kottarakara Tampuran was more of a dramatist than a poet, more of a connoisseur than an artist.

Kottayam Tampuran

The greatest fillip to the growth of *Attakkatha* as a literary form and *Kathakali* as a performing art came from Kottayam Tampuran, a prince in the royal family of Northern Kottayam who is believed to have lived in the late 17th century. His main *Attakkathas* are *Bakavadham*, *Kalyana Saunghandhikam*, *Kirmiravadham* and *Kalakeyavadham*. Their success led to the phenomenal popularity of this form of literary composition. Kottayam was a more gifted poet and scholar than Kottarakara, and in his hands *Attakkatha* attained a position of respectability. His quartrains are invariably in Sanskrit, but the *padas* are in Malayalam. Several of his *padas* are extremely popular not only with the *Kathakali* audience but even with the general public. They are also good as poetry. The dialogue between Hanuman and Bhima in *Kalyana Saugandhikam* or the one between Urvashi and Arjuna in *Kalakeyavadham* will bear out this point:

Hanuman (pretending to be an old monkey, not revealing his identity as Bhima's elder brother):

Who is it that has come to my side,
Tell me, brave one, who is it?
Too old and tired am I;
How can I receive you properly?
I am too lazy also, O great King.
To greet you and speak to you properly.

Bhima (not knowing that the old monkey is his elder brother Hanuman who is going to test Bhima playfully).

Who is this fool, tell me, wicked fellow,
Get away from my path.
Have you not, old monkey, heard of me
The brave son of the wind-god.
Why do you, for no reason, block my path?
I will kill you, no doubt, and
Send you to the god of death.

Hanuman : O King, please do not be angry,
Please be kind, O supreme among men;
Kind-hearted one, equal to the lord of the sea!

Bhima : Know you that I am the brother of Maruti
Who smashed with his hand at once
Aksha, son of the Rakshasa Chief (Ravana)

Hanuman : You may remove my tail and clear the path
And then you may proceed soon, O lotus-eyed one!

Bhima : Then you will see my powers
In the battlefield, no doubt, today,
You will be put to grief quite soon,
If you are brave and fight against me.

The dramatic irony anticipating boastful Bhima's collapse makes the passage really interesting.

Unnayi Warriar

The end of the 17th century and the early quarter of the 18th century saw the enrichment of *Kathakali* literature by the production of Unnayi Warriar's *Nalacharitham* in four parts, the greatest *attakkatha* of all time. Unnayi Warriar was a poet of exceptional skill. His sense of drama, command

over language, knowledge of dance and music and insight into human psychology enabled him to present the story of Nala and Damayanthi in a compact form, observing *auchitya* to the maximum extent possible. He also sticks to the concept of a dominant rasa supported by other dependent rasas. The dramatic unravelling of the ups and downs in the career of a noble king and his beloved consort is magnificently achieved by Warrior. Variety in situation and characterization are provided by the introduction of characters like Kali, Pushkara, Rituparna, Karkotaka, Kattala and even the Hamsam (Swan). Even minor characters are presented as fulfilled human beings. *Nalacharitham* is the highwatermark of *Kathakali* literature mainly because of its profound human interest. The central plot is concerned with the fall of a noble and good man brought about by his accidental involvement in a game of dice and by the intervention of evil forces like Kali. He is rescued at the end, by his steadfastness and adherence to moral values. The heroine is unconsciously responsible for the jealousy of Kali, but at the end it is her goodness and her intelligence that come to the king's aid. King Nala and his queen, Damayanti, have become immortal characters illustrating through their sufferings the vicissitudes of human fortunes.

Among the many special features of *Nalacharitham*, is the happy blending of poetry, *abhinaya* (acting) and *nritya* (dance). One of the most felicitous passages from this point of view is the scene between Damayanti and the Swan-messenger. The cleverness of the Swan in drawing Damayanti away from her maids is superb dramatic material. He follows it up with an equally clever way of revealing his identity to her. Once her curiosity is aroused, it is easy for the Swan to find out how much she is interested in Nala. With his encoura *Nishadha* Kundinam to take the good news to King Nala. In the third day's play we have a touching soliloquy spoken by Nala, now separated from his wife, sleepless in his grief, in the saddest moment of his life:

In the lonely vast forest, alas,
O moon-faced one, what do you do, waking up in pain?
Who (is there) but the wolf for help? or,
Have you reached home, timid one?

When can I see your moon-bright face?
When embrace your body coveted by the gods?
Beloved, what did you get there when you were hungry,
As I lay in stupor born of illusion?
O God! my blessed one, I cannot bear to think of you
O parrot-tongued one, and the wild forest full of
howling Jackals.

Unnayi Warriar seems to have been influenced by the pattern of classical drama in Sanskrit. This has helped him to tighten the structure instead of leaving it to be loosely held together as in most *attakkathas*. The introduction of Narada as a kind of celestial Sutradhara to control and direct the course of the play provides a meaningful framework to the whole structure. His poetic gift has encouraged him to take freedom in the use of language. With the same boldness he has kept out as far as possible the merely conventional passages, often found in *attakkathas* but irrelevant to plot and character. *Nalacharitham* has an organic unity rarely found in *attakkathas*. Of all the writers of *attakkathas*, Unnayi Warriar alone seems to have had the totality of his work in perspective; most of the others concentrated on the details and forgot about the whole. He was also more serious-minded than the others since there is a basically moral outlook controlling and underscoring the destinies of the characters presented by him. He must have meditated deeply on the presence of evil in the world and has tried to account for it in the course of his work.

Princes and Poets

The Golden Age of *Kathakali* saw two poets in the royal family. Kartika Tirunal Rama Varma Maharaja (1724-1798) was a scholar in many languages and a great patron of learning and the fine arts. His Sanskrit work, *Balaramabharatam* is unique in that it tries to codify his own ideas of dance, music and drama. His main contributions to literature are seven *attakkathas*: *Rajasooyam*, *Subhadraharanam*, *Bakavadham*, *Gandharva Vijayam*, *Panchali Swayamvaram*, *Kalyana Sougandhikam* and

Narakasuravadhom Part I. An expert in *Natya Sastra* and a patron of *Kathakali*, Kartika Tirunal is perhaps the greatest of our ruler authors.

Kartika Tirunal's nephew Aswati Tirunal Ilaya Tampuran (1756-1794) is chiefly remembered for his five *attakkathas*: *Narakasuravadham Part-II*, *Rugmini Swayamwaram*, *Pootana Moksham*, *Ambarisha Charitam* and *Poundraka Vadham*. Aswati Tirunal was gifted with genuine poetic talent. Some of the *padas* in *Pootana Moksham* like "not even the king of serpents can describe the glory of Ampady": have a delicate workmanship about them. It is a pity that this poet died at the early age of thirty-eight.

Ramapurathu Warriier (1703-1753)

In the court of Maharaja Martanda Varma, the maker of the former State of Travancore and his successor Kartika Tirunal Rama Varma, there flourished a number of poets distinguished in several ways. Ramapurathu Warriier, the author of *Kuchela Vrittom Vanchippattu*, was one of them. The *Vanchippattu* or Boat song is a poetic form of folk origin. *Kuchela Vrittam* is the most famous boat song in the language. Composed entirely in the Dravidian metre *nathonnata*, it is a popular classic that retells the story of kuchela, the indigent devotee and one-time classmate of Sri Krishna, going to Dwaraka to pay homage to him. The poverty of the old Brahmin and his family is described with extreme authenticity. The realistic touch shown by the poet in presenting this Puranic story with a personal edge to it has gained immense popularity for the work. In the poem, the poet specifically refers to King Martanda Varma and describes the circumstances under which he came to write the poem. Warriier makes Kuchela's wife declare. "there is no greater affliction than that of poverty". The meeting of Kuchela with Krishna is described in memorable language.

Because of either the joy of seeing the Brahmin
Or the grief at the thought of his misery
Shouri's eyes filled with tears, whatever be the cause;
Has the brave lotus-eyed one ever wept at all?

Warriier has also translated *Gitagovinda* into Malayalam.

Kunchan Nambiar (1705-1770)

Before he came to the court at Thiruvananthapuram, Kunchan Nambiar had spent his early childhood at Killikurissimangalam, his boyhood at Kudamaloor and his youth at Ambalapuzha. In 1748, he moved to Thiruvananthapuram, first at the court of Martandavarma and later at the court of Kartika Tirunal Rama Varma. He had already written several of his works before leaving Ambalapuzha. The chief contribution of Nambiar is the invention and popularization of a new performing art known as *Tullal*. The word literally means “dance”. but under this name Nambiar devised a new style of verse narration with a little background music and dance-like swinging movement to wean the people away from *Chakkiyar Koothu*, which was the form popular till then. He was to use pure Malayalam as opposed to the stylized and Sanskritized language of *Koothu*. He also adopted many elements from *Padayani* or *Kolam Tullal* and certain other folk arts. It is reasonable to assume that he was himself a performer. A first-hand knowledge of the various talas and ragas and even the practices of drummers is a pre-requisite for the writing of a *Tullal*. Kunchan Nambiar possessed this in abundance. Each *Tullal* composition consists of a Puranic tale retold in simple, rhythmic verse, fit for loud recitation before an audience. There are three kinds of *Tullal* distinguished on the basis of the performer’s costume and the style of rendering, viz, *Ottan*, *Seetankan* and *Parayan*. Dravidian metres are used throughout although there is nothing to prevent the insertion of a quatrain in a Sanskrit metre. Nambiar also developed new metres (e.g. *Vaythari* metres) based on the vocal notation for various *talas*. The language also is predominantly Malayalam with a large admixture of colloquial and dialectal forms. Humour is invariably the dominant mood: other *bhavas* are brought in for variety and to suit the situation.

Kunchan Nambiar is believed to have written over forty *Tullal* compositions. Some scholars allot a larger number to his credit. They belong to all the three types: 21 *Ottan*, 11 *Seetankan* and 9 *Parayan*. The most important of Nambiar’s *Tullals* are: *Syamantakam*, *Ghoshayatra*, *Kiratam*, *Santanagopalam*, *Patacharitam*, *Kartaviryarjunavijayam*, *Bakavadham*, *Kalyana Saugandhikam*, *Hariniswayamvaram*, *Tripuradahanam* and

Sabha Pravesam. Nambiar was an extrovert and observed the life around very closely. He was also very critical of the social evils he saw around him. Thus even when the main story is from the puranas, he would introduce digressions in plenty and use such occasions to comment on life in his own time. He did not worry about the charge of anachronism. He knew his audience very well: not scholars and poets, but laymen, especially soldiers, barely literate. In one of his works he says:

It is impossible to entertain without laughter
Those soldiers who think they should stay
If it is a comic tale, or else should leave the place

He certainly succeeded in his aim. He is comparable to Chaucer and Rabelais for his boisterous humour and knowledge of contemporary life. Like them, he too borders on the obscene at times, as a matter of concession to the audience or readers. All classes of people and all professions come in for sharp criticism in his compositions. Nambudiris, Tamil Brahmins, Nayars, courtiers, courtesans. Nambiar is undoubtedly the greatest satirist in Malayalam. An example of how he introduces a satire on contemporary life into a text based on a puranic episode may be found in the following passage from *Karthavirarjuna Vijayam*. Ravana is speaking to Narada about his own prowess that has reduced other kings to utter misery.

The kingdom of the Gandharaka ruler
Has turned into a mere desert
The land of the Simhala King
Is now filled with lions and leopards
The lord of the Chera people
Feeds himself on cheap vegetables
The Chola King has nothing to eat
Except the maize of low quality
The kings of the Kuru house
Have nothing but jackfruit seeds
The lord of the land of Kashmir

Is busy eating cucumbers.
The ruler of the Champeya land
Eats only tubers and broken rice.
The Konkan prince is about to die.
Thinking of his wives' breasts.

After Ravana reaches Hehaya, his messengers announce that everybody should owe allegiance to him.

Tributes must be paid form time to time,
Half the yield should be given to me.
The whole of pepper yield should be handed over
Coconut, arecanut, mango, jackfruit
All the trees should be confiscated
There will be no place in my country
For the pomp of local barons.
Double the seed crop should be given
To me by every houseowner.
The Tamil Brahmins (Pattars) staying here
Should also give one fourth to me.
The Nayars who stay at home.
Should take their bows and spears
And stay at the residence of Ravana
And do whatever chores are assigned
Nayars who drink toddy
Would be beaten up, beware!

Nambiar's poetry perhaps lacks the high seriousness such as we find in Ezhuthachan. The difference here is significant. The two are complementary. Just as *Kilipattu* seems to express the total personality of a writer like Ezhuthachan, the *Tullal* brings out this characteristic features of the personality of Nambiar. Between them they cover the entire spectrum of humanity, the entire gamut of human emotions. No other *Kilipattu* has come anywhere near Ezhuthachan's *Ramayanam* and *Mahabharatam*, no, *Tullal* composition is ever likely to equal the best of Nambiar's compositions.

After Nambiar

There has been a great lull in the field of literary creation in Malayalam for nearly a century after the death of Kunchan Nambiar. No great work of literature was produced during this long and uneasy interregnum. There was however a consistent and steady development of prose at this time. Several regional versions of *Keralolpathi*, tracing the beginnings of Kerala history, began to appear. Father Clement's *Sankshepa Vedartham* came out in 1772. Paremakkal Thoma Kathanar (1737-1799) wrote the first travelogue in Malayalam, *Varthamanapustakam*, (Book of News). It is perhaps the most sustained piece of prose writing written till that date. The works of Christian missionaries like Arnos Patiri (John Ernestus Hanksalden, 1699-1732) and Paulinose Patiri (John Philip Wesdin, 1748-1806) also led to a widening of the range of topics and themes in Malayalam literature.

The transition from the 18th century to the 19th century did not immediately lead to any great spurt of literary activity. The intrusion of European influence was beginning to be felt in the national life at large. The starting of schools on the British model and the introduction of English as a subject of study were to have tremendous impact in the years to come. Maharaja Swati Thirunal (1813-1847) is a symbol of the process of modernization that was beginning to be set in motion at the time. Like Kartika Tirunal Rama Varma who was not only a patron of literature and the arts but also a distinguished writer of *attakkathas*, Swati Tirunal was both a patron and a poet-musician. He is perhaps the most distinguished music composer of Kerala. The foundations of modern education were laid in the former State of Travancore during his reign. Among the great writers at his court, the most talented was without doubt Irayimman (Ravi Varman) Tampi (1783-1856). He is chiefly remembered today for two things: one, a delicate and exquisite lullaby poem ("Is it the darling baby moon") and three well-designed and superbly composed *attakkathas* (*Keechakavadham*, *Utharaswayamvaram* and *Dakshayagom*). Like his patron, Tampi also wrote a number of songs to be set to music. As a writer of *attakkathas*, Tampi has only one formidable rival, Unnayi Warriar. His padas are themselves

exquisite musical compositions. Tampi has an unerring ear, and for sheer verbal felicity, his *attakkathas* have few rivals. He was a master of words and melody. The famous *dandaka* (long stanza) in *Keechakavadham* reveals Tampi's exquisite artistry with words; it describes in graphic and dramatic terms the response of Draupadi to the queen who had asked her to go to Keechaka's palace with his food.

Hearing the words of the queen
The deer-eyed one shuddered,
Her eyes turned red - she was overcome with fatigue.
She offered many excuses to her
But harsh words made her quiet.
Servitude, she thought, an object of derision for all;
She lowered her eyes,
She, superior to heavenly damsels, but now
Bereft of joy.
Her clothes became soiled and wet
With tears and sweat;
Her body trembling, she stood there
With the vessel in her hand
Then started walking then stopped on the way,
She felt exhausted like a deer
That goes to the den of the enemy of all deer.

Kilimanoor Vidwan Rajaraja Varma Koyitampuran (1812-1846, also known as Kareendran) was also at the court of Swati Tirunal. He is chiefly remembered for his *attakkatha*, *Ravana Vijayam*, one of the most popular of *attakkathas*. The roles of Ravana and Rambha are particularly suited to the *Kathakali* style of presentation, and although part of the play represents a rape, its crudity is considerably toned down by the highly stylized gestures and movements and the lyrical quality of the verse. In the hands of inept actors it can lead to excessive vulgarity. Critics of *attakkatha* literature will take these as signs of decadence, as a true representation of the erotic exuberance characteristic of the elitist feudal class of the time.

The Venmani School

The third quarter of the nineteenth century bore witness to the rise of a new school of poets devoted to (1) the observation of life around them and (2) the use of pure Malayalam. They aimed at a certain simplicity and directness, preferring words of Dravidian origin and Sanskrit words that would not sound strange or harsh. They thus achieved a balanced middle style with a slight bias towards the Dravidian elements (although "mahan" pseudo-Sanskrit for Malayalam "makan" does not bear this out). Euphony was their watchword. An easy flowing diction that creates no problem for loud and relaxed recitation, a smooth and even rhythmic cadence, maximum clarity of meaning and a pervasive sense of humour and light-heartedness: these qualities were inherited from the champoos via the writers of the *muktakas* (single independent quatrains making up complete poetic crystals) like Chelapparampu Nambudiri of a generation earlier.

The major poets of the Venmani school were Venmani Acchan Nambudiri (1817-1891), Venmani Mahan Nambudiri (1844-1893), Poonthottam Acchan Nambudiri (1821-1865), Poonthottam Mahan Nambudiri (1857-1896) and the members of the Kodungalloor Kovilakam. The style of these poets became quite popular for a while and influenced even others who were not members of the group like Velutheri Kesavan Vaidyar (1839-1897) and Perunnelli Krishnan Vaidyan (1863-1894). The fact that they represented a kind of moral decadence is not fully recognized by scholars and critics. The slight realism they resorted to was meant only to highlight the down to earth appeal of their erotic exuberance. They were incapable of moral earnestness or intellectual high seriousness. There is nothing in their writings that remind us of the central tradition of Malayalam poetry, beginning in folk poetry and later *Ramacharitam* and gradually evolving through the Niranam poets, Cherusseri, Poonthanam, Ezhuthachan and Kunchan Nambiar. It is necessary to point out that Nambiar's humour has a basis in social criticism. The humour of the Venmani poets is an end in itself; it is an indulgence in the ludicrous and ridiculous for its own sake. This explains why they could write *Ambopadesams* over and over again, in which a grandmother gives instructions to the granddaughter on the art of

courtesanship, Venmani Mahan, Kochunni Tampuran, Naduvath Acchan, Oravankara Neelakantan Nambudiri: each wrote an Ambopadesam on the model of the old *Manipravala* classic *Vaisika Tantram*. They all invariably resorted to Sanskrit metres in these works. Another favourite form of poetic exercise for these poets was to string together the names of contemporary poets comparing them to various flowers (as in *Kavipushpamala*, by Venmani Mahan), to different characters in Mahabharata (as in *Kavibharatam* by Kunjukuttan Tampuran), to characters in *Ramayana* (as in the later *Kaviramayanam* by Mooloor S. Padmanabha Panikkar), to animals (as in *Kavimrigavali* by Oduvil Kunjukrishna Menon) and to birds (as in *Kavipakshimala* by Koyippalli Parameswara Kurup).

The most representative poem of the Venmani school is perhaps *Pooraprabandham*, which reveals both the strong and the weak points of the movement. Except for the modernity of the diction and the finish in versification, it is difficult to see any great difference between the descriptive passages in *Pooraprabandham* and those in the earlier champoos (where also we get realistic descriptions of local people and market place with a touch of pointless humour).

The Kodungalloor school was an offshoot of the Venmani School, but some of the poets like Kunjukuttan Tampuran had a greater seriousness in their vocation. The best evidence for his commitment to his vocation is his magnificent translation of the whole of Vyasa's *Mahabharata* completed in the course of a few months. But most of the Kodungalloor poets took poetry for a pastime and indulged in versification for want of any other form of entertainment. The neoclassical games of instant poetic composition, verse-making competition, recitation competition, joint composition of poems, *samasya* or riddle completion, writing to prescriptions and various other kinds of formulaic exercises were their main concern. They have, no doubt, produced a number of quatrains in Sanskrit metres which are pleasant to recite aloud but they give no deep or complex experience to the reader. In their hands, poetry became a skill, a game, a performance without any spiritual dimension. The various controversies of the time had nothing to do with the fundamentals of poetic experience or poetic communication. The

squabble over the second syllable rhyme is a good example to show how superficial they were in their speculations on poetry. One had only to look into Kalidasa's *Meghadoot* (Cloud Messenger) to realize how the music of poetry was different from the concatenation of similar consonants in the different lines of a stanza. But that was perhaps the last breath of the neoclassical trend which ushered in the Romantic Renaissance at the end of the century.

Perhaps this is the place where mention could be made of what has come to be called Mappilappattukal. These songs are chiefly the works of poets from the Mappila (Muslim) community and are written mostly in Arabi-Malayalam, a mixture of Arabic and Malayalam. They have a strong local flavour and belong to the general category of folk poetry. Some are anonymous and are popular in the region, although now they are read and enjoyed all over Kerala. There are public recitals of these poems, which are often related to specific social functions and rituals like Oppana. Among the greatest poets of this sub-genre are Moyinkutty Vaidyar and Pulikkottil Hyder. There are love lyrics as well as narratives (like, *Kappappattu*, which has a symbolic mystical dimension).

The Modern Age

Nineteenth century was not a very creative period for Malayalam literature (except towards the end) from the point of view of imaginative writing. But the foundations for the great renaissance that began at the end of the century were laid during this period. The establishment of colleges for imparting English education, the translation of the Bible and other religious works, the compilation of dictionaries and grammars, the formation of the text book committee, the growth of printing presses, the starting of newspapers and periodicals, the introduction of science and technology, the beginning of industrialization and the awakening of social and political consciousness: these constitute the giant strides towards modernization. It would appear as if the people's energies were totally consumed by these activities.

Like his predecessors Swati Thirunal and Uttram Thirunal, Ayilyam Thirunal Rama Varma Maharaja of Travancore (1832-1880) was a great patron of letters. There were many great scholars at his court. He was personally interested in promoting prose literature. He himself wrote, while still young, two prose works *Meenaketanacharitam* and *Bhasha Sakuntalam* which were published by Kerala Varma Valiya Koyitampuran after his death. In *Meenaketanacharitam* one of the Arabian tales is retold; *Bhasha Shakunthalam* is a free translation of Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*. These two works are pioneers indicating the way Malayalam literature was destined to develop in the coming decades. The spate of translations from Indian languages including Sanskrit and from European languages including English, which began in Ayilyam Tirunal's time, has not yet abated.

Vishakam Tirunal Rama Varma Maharaja (1837-1885) who succeeded Ayilyam Tirunal, was also an indefatigable promoter of education and the arts. Himself a talented writer of discursive prose in English and translator of English works into Malayalam, he was the cause that others also took up writing original works and doing translations. Chidambara Vadhyar who had translated Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *The Winter's Tale* into Malayalam received encouragement from him. Visakham Thirunal was one of the earliest essayists in Malayalam. Benjamin Bailey (1805-1871) Joseph Peet, Richard Collins and George Mathen (1819-1870) were responsible for many works on Malayalam language based on western models. Archdeacon Koshy (1826-1900) is remembered for his numerous works in prose, especially for his work *Pulleli Kunchu* (1882).

Perhaps the most important of these missionaries was Herman Gundert (1814-1893). Born in Stuttgart in Germany and educated at Tübingen and Switzerland, Gundert came to India in 1836. He wrote over twenty books in Malayalam, the most important of which are *A Malayalam-English Dictionary*, *A Grammar of Malayalam*, *Keralappazhama (Kerala antiquity)* and *Pazhamcholmala (A garland of proverbs)*. He also edited an anthology of prose and verse for the use of students under the name, *Pathamala*. The first authoritative grammar of Malayalam was also Gundert's contribution (1851). This led to the production of a number of grammatical works in Malayalam. Vaikkam Patchu Moothathu (1814-1883)

published his *Grammar of Malayalam* in 1876, *Kerala Kaumudi* by Kovunni Nedungadi (1831-1889) came out in 1878. This was soon followed by the first history of the language by P. Govinda Pillai (1849-1897) published in 1881. The first work on rhetoric in Malayalam on the European model was brought out by Father Gerad under the title *Alankara Sastram* in the same year. These works are a clear indication of the increasing western influence which became established by the end of the 19th century. There were of course distinguished scholars of the traditionalist school like Kaikulangara Rama Warriar (1833-1897), who specialised in writing commentaries on the classics of Sanskrit literature. But the influence of Kerala Varma Valiya Koyithampuran and the general socio-political developments seemed to favour a reorientation towards western models. This trend continued to be powerful until the middle of the 20th century.

Kerala Varma Valiya Koyithampuran

Kerala Varma represents the confluence of two major traditions in literature, the Oriental as represented by the Sanskrit classics and the Western represented by English/European classics. His translation of Kalidasa's *Abhinjana Shakuntalam* (completed in 1882), and of Von Limburg Brower's *Akbar* (started in 1882) clearly illustrates the historic role of a synthesizer which he was destined to play on the Kerala cultural front. His connections with the royal family, his education and upbringing, his position as president of the Text Book Committee, his progressive and independent outlook, his intellectual prowess and other personality factors made him tower head and shoulders above all his contemporaries. He wrote a number of works in both Sanskrit and Malayalam, both in prose and verse but his personal influence was greater than what was achieved through these works. It may be said that the man was greater than all his writings. Well versed in all aspects of classical Sanskrit poetics and quite at home in the native tradition, with a good command of English as well master of a sonorous Sanskrit diction and proficient in simple colloquial Malayalam, Kerala Varma's reputation still depends not on any single book he wrote.

The development of Malayalam language and literature was his life's mission; and in collaboration with C.P. Achutha Menon (editor of

Vidyavinodini magazine) and Kandathil Varghese Mappila (editor of *Malayala Manorama*), he did his utmost to encourage all kinds of writers and writings. Even undeserving quill-pushers received his support, encouragement and blessing in this process of all-out promotion of letters. His most widely known literary work is *Mayurasandesam* (Peacock Message) written in 1884. Its intrinsic merits were perhaps exaggerated at the time of its first appearance, but its historical importance is yet to be properly assessed. It is a work that looks in many directions. It harks back to Kalidasa, the most romantic and subjective work of that poet, whose influence among other things was chiefly responsible for the revival of romanticism in 19th century Europe. It combines the mixed style of *Manipravala* poems with the pure Malayalam of Venmani poets but used for a “personal” communication. It allows the free play of fancy (as seen in the pun on “Neelakanta”), but also reveals the operation of complex imagination at times (as in the identification quatrain). It would be too much to say that *Mayurasandesam* anticipates the romantic movement but there is no doubt that there is a softening of the rhetoric of classicism in several of its quatrains. Already in the heart of classicism one hears the soft notes of romantic lyricism:

Once while alone hunting birds in the park,
O blue-eyed one, I happened to kill a bird.
Out of pity for his bereaved companion close by
Did you not, O timid one, ask me to kill her too!

The lyrical note is heard at some depth, the subjective element is openly acknowledged; these are important gains. Some of his prose essays are of an informal, subjective type like *Mrigayasmaranakal* (Memories of Hunting).

The Growth of Literary Criticism

The establishment of periodicals was a factor directly responsible for the development of literary criticism. The year 1890 saw the starting of two important periodicals, Kandathil Varghese Mappila’s *Malayala Manorama* and C.P. Achutha Menon’s *Vidyavinodini*. Appan Thampuran

started his *Rasikaranjini* in 1903. Varghese Mappila had the active co-operation of Kottarathil Sankunni, the author of *Aithiyamala*. Bhashaposhini Sabha acted as a catalyst. C.P. Achutha Menon wrote a number of perceptive reviews which are still marvels of honesty, frankness, fearlessness, and commitment to definite values. Here is an example to show his sense of commitment.

Since defects exceed virtues in new books, it is inevitable that, when one tries to express unbiased and impartial opinions on them, the demonstration of faults may be more conspicuous. We are scincerely sorry that as we do point out these defects, some people are deeply hurt. But then we cannot but do so, since our interest in our literature is far greater than their hurt feelings.

Reviewing another book called *Rathisundari*, Achutha Menon says “Man’s life on earth is limited and sorrowfilled; hence whether wasting part of it on the painful experience of reading books like this is a sin, let the conscience of good people decide; whether it is a legal crime, let the advocates decide.”

The Plethora of Plays

In the wake of Kerala Varma’s translation of Kalidasa’s *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* (which got him the title of Kerala Kalidasa), several attempts were made to translate numerous plays from Sanskrit and English into Malayalam. Chathukutty Mannadiar translated *Uttararamacharitham* and *Janakiparinayam*. Other translations followed, such as *Kalahini Damanakom* from Shakespere’s *Taming of the Shrew*. New plays came to be written in this fanciful style. These plays were seldom acted. The stage conditions of those days were crude and unfit to project a performance. Most writers did not care for or know enough of the technique of stage presentation. This delayed the growth of an indigenous dramatic form and structure in the language. Numerous plays on the model of Sanskrit drama, using both prose and verse, came to be written about this time. As if irritated by this and with a view to discouraging the plethora of plays of low quality,

P. Rama Kurup wrote *Chakki Chankaram* (1893). There was another *Chakki Chankaram* (1894) by K.C. Narayanan Nambiar (1873-1922). The effect of this burlesque of the couple, Chakki and Chankaran, was to put an end, temporarily at least, to the mad rush for producing plays fashionable at the time.

A.R. Rajaraja Varma (1863-1918)

Kerala Varma's nephew A.R. Rajaraja Varma went a step further than his uncle in the promotion of a synthesis between the different trends current in the literature of his time. A professor in the University College, Thiruvananthapuram, he had to modernize the process of teaching Malayalam language and literature; this made him write books on grammar and rhetoric (which earned him the title of *Kerala Panini*) and eventually prepare the ground for an enlightened renaissance in Malayalam poetry and literary criticism. His differences of opinion with Kerala Varma were not confined to the continued use of the second syllable rhyme: behind the controversy lay the basis of a new poetics: the rejection of neoclassicism and the acceptance of a romantic theory of literature. The influence of the study of British Romantic poets of the 19th century coupled with a renewed interest in the real classics of Sanskrit literature can be seen in Rajaraja Varma's poetic efforts. The critic and scholar in him might have stifled the poet, but in works like *Malayavilasam* he may be seen as looking forward to an expected romantic revival. His translation of Kalidasa and Bhasa and the preface he wrote for Kumaran Asan's *Nalini* point to this trend in unmistakable terms. Like Kerala Varma, Rajaraja Varma also contributed significantly to the growth of prose through his essays.

K.C. Kesava Pillai (1868-1914)

A close associate of both Kerala Varma and Rajaraja Varma, K.C. Kesava Pillai was a man of remarkable talent. His major works are *Kesaviyam* (a mahakavya), *Sadarama* (a musical play on the Tamil model, extremely popular at the time), *Asanna marana chinta satakam* (Reflections of a Dying Man, in a century of quatrains) and a number of *attakkathas*.

His *Kesaviyam* is a mahakavya modelled on the Sanskrit pattern and strictly adhering to the rules of structure and style laid down by the classical rhetorician, Dandi.

The first fifteen years of the 20th century saw a mushrooming of mahakavyas. Kesava Pillai's contemporaries like Azhakathu Padmanabha Kurup (1869-1932: author of *Ramachandravilasam*), Pandalam Kerala Varma (1879-1919: author of *Rukmangatha charitam*), Kattakkayam Cherian Mappila (1859 - 1937: author of *Sri Yesu Vijayam*), Ulloor Parameswara Iyer (1877-1949 : author of *Umakeralam*) and Vallathol Narayana Menon (1879-1958: author of *Chitrayogam*), all paid their obeisance to this neoclassicist trend. P. Sankaran Nambiar refers to the appearance of a mock-mahakavya *Kothakelam* by one Vidushaka, which did to the flood of these exercises what Ramakurup's *Chakki Chankaram* did to the imitation plays, *Datyuha Sandesam* (1897) by Seevolli Narayanan Nambudiri (1869-1906) did to spurious message poems and *Parangodi Parinayam* (1892) by Kizhakeppatt Ramankutty Menon (1858-1894) under inspiration from Kesari Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar, tried to do to the spurt of uninspired novels in imitation of *Indulekha*.

K.C. Kesava Pillai was also a distinguished composer of songs of rare merit and his position as a composer is next only to those of Swati Tirunal and Irayimman Tampi among Kerala musicians. But his best work as a poet is *Asanna marana chintasatakam* which, although written for a competition, is a touching lyrical monologue with a predominant elegiac tone and anticipates the *Khandakavyam* or shorter poems of the poets of the renaissance. It has an underground connection with C.S. Subramanian Potti's *Oruvilapam* (A Lament 1903), V.C. Balakrishna Panikkar's *Oruvilapam* (A Lament: 1908), and even Kumaran Asan's *Veena Poovu* (A Fallen Flower: 1907) which may be thought of as an elegy in disguise.

The Essay

The developments in prose at this time were very significant, Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar (1861-1895), more famous under his pseudonym Kesari, was one of the first to explore the essay form in

Malayalam. He was closely associated with periodicals like *Kerala Chandrika* (started in 1879 at Thiruvananthapuram), *Kerala Patrika* (started in 1884 by C. Kunhiraman Menon (1854-1936) and Appu Nedungadi (1866-1934) at Kozhikode), *Kerala Sanchari* (after 1898 under the editorship of Murkoth Kumaran) and the English Journal *Malabar Spectator*. Kesari has often been compared to Mark Twain. As he was not overburdened with scholarship, he could write in a simple, popular, informal style. He was a life-long devotee of the goddess of comedy. Here is a passage from his essay, "The Pleasures of Death"

When you don't have to breathe any longer, you will not be troubled by the innumerable germs of disease in the air nor by the insufferable smoke from other people's cigars, etc. Nothing to be anxious about even if motor cars and bicycles send up dust while driving along or if you fall or die or your nose is hurt. You don't have to endure any such grief. You don't have to put up any longer with the ringing of bells or the call of the siren or frog-tongued voice-refiners exerting their throats or reciting songs from plays even on the road. Kesari belongs to the comic tradition in our literature, and like Tholan, Nambiar, Chandu Menon, E. V. Krishna Pillai and Sanjayan he was a sharp critic of social reality.

The Rise of the Novel

An inevitable consequence of the development of prose was a creative use of this medium for imaginative literary communication. The last quarter of the 19th century saw the birth of the novel in Malayalam. It has been pointed out that the novel arose in Kerala as in other regions of India, not just because of European influence through English education but chiefly because the conditions that existed in India at this time were similar to those in England in the 17th and 18th centuries which favoured the growth of this new form of writing called the novel. It would perhaps be more correct to say that both internal socio-educational conditions and external influence combined to produce and popularize this new genre. It

was perhaps not wholly transplanted as a finished product into Malayalam: the existence of the printing press, the growth of a literate reading public, the development of the habit of buying books, the increasing requirements of educational institutions and libraries, the rise in the status of women (Appu Nedungadi, the author of *Kundalatha* was also the founder of the society for the promotion of the education of women, Chandu Menon also thought of women as potential readers of his works) and the gradual penetration of democratic ideas and liberalism into the social fabric: these were essential factors which by their conjunction could favour the growth of the novel in Malayalam.

The question which is the first novel in Malayalam can be answered only if we agree on the definition of the novel. *Ghathaka Vadham* (The Slayer Slain) by Mrs. Collins, *Pullelikunchu* by Archdeacon Koshy, his translation of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Ayilyam Thirunal's translation of *Meenaketanacharitham*, Kerala Varma's translation of Akbar - these certainly have a historical importance. The use of prose for long narratives based on non-puranic themes was itself of great importance. Appu Nedungadi's *Kundalata* (1887) marks an important stage in the development of prose fiction in Malayalam. The events are supposed to have taken place in a far-off place and the characters bear more or less outlandish names like Kundalata, Aghoranathan, Ramakisoran and Tharanathan. *Pullelikunchu* has greater realism as far as physical details are concerned. Parts of *Kundalatha* read like the prose romances which in England and other countries of Europe preceded the novel. Appu Nedungadi may have been influenced by Bengali novels too, since the novel as the term is understood in the modern world appeared earliest in Bengali than in other Indian languages. The air was thick with expectations of the birth of the great novel all through the 1880's when in the last year of the decade O. Chandu Menon brought out his *Indulekha*.

O. Chandu Menon (1847-1900)

In the preface to the first edition of *Indulekha* (1889) Chandu Menon describes the genesis of the novel thus.

I began to read English novels extensively after I left Calicut in the end of 1886, and I then devoted all the leisure which my official duties left me, to novel reading. Thereupon, I found that my circle of intimates with whom I had been accustomed to pass the time in social conversation and amusement considered itself somewhat neglected, and I accordingly endeavoured to find means by which I could conciliate its members without in any degree for going my novels. With this object in view, I attempted at first to convey to them in Malayalam the gist of the story contained in some of the novels I had read, but my hearers did not seem particularly interested in the version which I gave them of two or three of these books. At last it happened that one of these individuals was greatly taken with Lord Beaconsfield's *Henrietta Temple*, and the taste then acquired for listening to novels translated orally, gradually developed into a passion. The importunity of this personage in the matter was so great that I had seldom time to read a book on my own account

Finally, I was urged to produce a written translation of the novel by Beaconsfield which I have mentioned, and I consented. But when I had made some little progress in the work, I thought the matter over, and decided that a translation thus made would be absolutely without value ... Taking therefore, all these circumstances (the difficulties and inadequacies of translation), I determined to write a Malayalam novel more or less after the English fashion and gave my persecutor a promise to this effect ...

I do not know how my countrymen will be disposed to regard a work of this description. Those who do not understand English have had no opportunity of reading stories in this mould, and I doubt if they will relish their first experience of this kind of literature.

This prefatory note, which itself reads like a passage in a novel highlights the twin sources of inspiration for the novel in Malayalam: the influence of the English model and the pressure of a readership. His last

sentence also makes it clear that at the time of writing, he thought of his work as the first novel in Malayalam, which incidentally is a possible answer to the question we posed at the beginning of our discussion on the novel.

Chandu Menon started as a writer rather late in his life. He wrote *Indulekha* his first work and a novel of no mean length in just about two months. It is easily seen that plot is not his strong point. But *Indulekha* is a work which Malayalis can always hold up aloft as an excellent specimen of what a novel should aim to be. The dramatic unfolding of the tale, the perfect balance between narration and dialogue, the magnificent characterization, the splendid direct and indirect criticism of manners and morals, the all-pervasive humour and irony, the vitality of every scene fully visualized—these are among the many virtues of his pioneering work of exceptional maturity. Chandu Menon started writing his second novel *Sarada*, but he could not finish it. The first part - about one third of the proposed work - was published in 1892. The author reveals here a firmer grip over the novel form: his speculations during the four-year interval between the two works, as P.K. Balakrishnan has pointed out, have taken him to a far more serious conception of the nature and function of the novel as a work of art.

The interview between *Indulekha* and Nambudiripad may be quoted to illustrate Chandu Menon's art at its ironic best.

"Are you mad about play, Indulekha?" inquired the Nambudiripad.

"Mad about what?" asked Indulekha.

"About the play—the Kathakali".

"I have never yet been mad about anything". answered Indulekha.

"Oh, I'm very mad about it, I'am as mad as I can be".

"I can quite believe that there is no doubt about it". responded Indulekha with a smile.

"How do you know, Indulekha? Did any one tell you about it before?"

"No, I knew it only now".

"You know it from what I said, did'nt you?"

"Exactly, I felt certain of it from your own words".

“I had a piece acted at your place yesterday”, said the Namboodiripad. “That fellow Raman acts beautifully on the stage. Have you ever heard of Raman, Indulekha? Raman, Raman, I mean: the Sudras call him Rama Panikkar, he is immensely clever, such a splendid actor and so handsome. Hereafter, Indulekha, you shall see a play every day. I am quite mad on it. I have a play on most nights of the week, and yesterday I saw a male impersonating a female character. You have never seen anything like it. It was Raghavan, a boy they call Raghavan. Do you know Raghavan, Indulekha? If his face were smooth, it would be just like yours, just like it; there wouldn’t be the slightest difference.”

The Religious Awakening

The impact of Western education was the great reality in Indian national life in the 19th century. The Renaissance in Bengal was its most direct consequence. Exposure to western culture made Indians look at their culture with a certain detachment. This led on the one hand to increased political awareness and consequently the struggle against foreign domination; on the other hand, it provoked the Indians to set about modernizing the Indian social structure which was still steeped in medievalism.

A new understanding of Indian culture, especially Hindu philosophy, was thus called for, and the efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sree Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda and others had their impact on Bengali literature. In Kerala too, there was a similar religious awakening. Sri Chattampi Swamikal (1854-1924) and Sree Narayana Guru (1857-1929), close companions often engaged in long wanderings as mendicants from place to place, were the harbingers of this new spirituality, a new moral idealism which was deeply rooted in both the wisdom of the past and the reality of the present.

Through their revolutionary reinterpretation of the philosophy of the Vedas and the Upanishads, they brought about a massive transformation in the basic moorings of our people. Both were gifted with a linguistic insight

and had a Dravidian orientation in the expression of their thought. Both used their writings - Chattampi Swamikal in prose and Narayana Guru in verse - to effect fundamental changes. Both achieved a fusion of intuition and reason, and co-ordinated the metaphysical with the mundane. Narayana Guru's poetic instinct found a supplementary fulfilment in the works of his disciple Kumaran Asan.

C.V. Raman Pillai (1858-1922)

The great renaissance that started in Malayalam literature towards the end of the 19th century found its most effective spokesmen in two great novelists and three poets. The two novelists were O. Chandu Menon of Malabar and C.V. Raman Pillai of Travancore. C.V. Raman Pilla was eleven years junior to Chandu Menon. Both benefited from English education, but consistent with their respective gifts and temperaments, they achieved near perfection in what they tried to do. Their high position as supreme masters of the novel remains unchallenged till date. Chandu Menon is the greatest novelist in Malayalam and C.V. Raman Pillai's *Ramaraja Bahadur* is the greatest novel. Chandu Menon's attention was focussed on contemporary social reality and through it he discovered the eternal springs of human character. C.V. Raman Pillai used history as a means of unfolding the intricacies of human life, both on the socio political plane and on the psychological plane. It is difficult to say whether he ever tried to explore history as a means of redemption. But it would be wrong to say that he does not concern himself with social reality: he does speculate on the role of leadership in society, on the fortunes of families through generations and on the conflict between character and destiny.

C.V. Raman Pillai's major contribution to fiction consists of *Martanda Varma* (published 1891), *Dharmaraja* (1893), *Premamritam* (started in 1915) and *Ramaraja Bahadur* (1913-20). *Martanda Varma* is a very early work, written under the direct influence of Walter Scott's Waverley novels, especially *Ivanhoe*. The history of Travancore (earlier Venad) - strictly speaking, the formation of the State of Travancore and its teething troubles - had caught and captured C.V. Raman Pillai's imagination

from his student days and it continued to be a haunting obsession for an entire lifetime. Centering around the love affair of Ananthapadmanabhan and Parukutty, the entire political conspiracy of Pappu Thampi and the Eight Nayar Houses against young Martanda Varma, the rightful heir to the throne on the matrilineal model, is hatched, unravelled, and foiled by the clever machinations of the prince and his able supporters. And yet outside of the involutions of the plot, the reader gets very little from the work. Most of the characters are either types or unfinished studies: the only exception is Subhadra, that flickering wick of love and loyalty beaming through the solid darkness of intrigue and treachery enveloping the main plot. History appears here as a fairy tale where our willing suspension of disbelief is the author's chief asset. The author himself makes it clear in the preface that he was writing a historical romance. But the style is adequate, the narration is bold, and the plot is ingenious.

The work shows, even as Kerala Varma's *Akbar* tries to demonstrate, that the style for a novel of epic dimensions is a combination of Sanskritized diction, repeated rhetorical flourishes and heavy dramatic juxtapositions. The colloquial or contemporary language might be judiciously used for certain characters in certain scenes, but must inevitably merge in the larger sweep and must swell the chorus for the final effect. This principle is kept up in C.V. Raman Pillai's maturer novels also. *Dharmaraja*, published twenty two years later, reveals what a big stride the author had taken during the interval. This is an unusual gap, but the glory is that C.V. Raman Pillai was able to bridge it and now with redoubted vigour and heightened imaginative power he ransacks the archives of Travancore history. Raja Kesava Das and the royal family whose fortunes he consciously chose to espouse, recede into the background; even the nominal love story of Meenakshi and Kesavan Unnithan pale into relative insignificance. The psychology of revenge and personal ambition and the ultimate triumph of moral power are the things that now come into the foreground. It is the tragedy of the Kazhakkootam House - high tragedy overtaking the scion of that "family of the unflinching heat" - that holds the attention of the novelist as well as the readers.

Ramaraja Bahadur, C.V. Raman Pillai's masterpiece, is conceived on an epic style, the little love story of Savitri and Trivikraman cannot loom very large on this cyclorama of history when the clash of wits and the crash of arms overwhelm the readers. If there is an epic for the people of Kerala, it is perhaps *Ramaraja Bahadur*. The high seriousness of the work is unmistakable. What is at stake in Tippu's invasion and the battle that follows is the fate of millions, not of just a king or a royal family. But within the nerve centre of this conflict of historical forces, there is the delicate situation of the two Kesavas: Kesava Pillai Dewanji and Kesavan Unnithan. The resolution of this two-fold war on the domestic front stirred up by Unnithan's jealousy and war on the country's frontier, is brought about at one stroke at the end. The inscrutable destiny of man, of both the individual and the masses, is the central theme of *Ramaraja Bahadur*, the structure of the plot, the skill in characterization, the narrative and descriptive power: all these are merely the means to the ultimate end of unravelling this mystery. *Ramaraja Bahadur* has attempted this more successfully than any other Malayalam novel written so far. Its imitators succumbed to an easy and total collapse because of their failure to understand this essential feature of C.V.'s art.

The Romantic Movement

The high tide of renaissance was brought into Malayalam literature by a variety of influences. The familiarity our poets acquired with British romantic poets was one of them. There were in 19th century Kerala, as in 18th century England, a number of precursors of the Romantic movement. One of the most gifted of them was V.C. Balakrishna Panikkar (1890-1915) - "the marvellous boy" of Malayalam poetry. In his short life he was able to make a tremendous breakthrough in the language and sensibility of Malayalam poets. His most important poems are "Oru Vilapam" and "Viswaroopam". The former, "A Lament" is a major elegy in Malayalam. The lover who is lamenting the death of his lady in an epidemic of cholera is the focus of our attention here. The opening quatrain presents him "as seated facing a lamp that continued to burn while he could not even push its wick". One quatrain must suffice to illustrate his intensity and power of phrasing:

The freshness that comes of beauty,
The frame arising from poetry,
The prestige due to scholarship,
The pomp on account of martial skill:
All virtues so described knock at the same gate
And merge at the end into the same ultimate
Source of all

N. Kumaran Asan (1873-1924)

The poet who most clearly symbolizes the poetic revolution in the first quarter of the 20th century is Kumaran Asan. His early discipleship of Sri Narayana Guru and his Sanskrit studies at Bangalore, Madras and Calcutta were important influences on his poetic development. The three and a half years he spent outside Kerala provided him with a kind of broad outlook and deep sensibility which would perhaps have been impossible if he had stayed at home. A deep moral and spiritual commitment became part of Asan's personality and when after a spell of writing devotional poetry he turned to secular themes, he could produce something without any precedent in the language. *Veena Poovu* (A fallen flower, 1907) combines the lyrical and the elegiac with the romantic. Yet the relaxed discipline of a classical training was always there to add a deeper tone to his close investigation of the meaning of life as seen in the brief career of a flower. The infinite delicacy of touch in passages like the following was rare in Malayalam poetry at that time (Translation by G. Kumara Pillai).

The mother-plant with loving care
Enfolded your infant charm in calyx soft;
The gentle breeze came rocking you to sleep
To the lullaby of the murmuring leaves.

Your lovely body told a moving tale
Of golden days of fulfilled youth;
Your days were brief, and yet so rich and full'
You had your woes, and yet your mind was steeped in joy.

The same close attention to detail may be found in all his poems, which authenticates and thereby enhances their spiritual glow. Asan did not try to write a neoclassicist mahakavya; instead he specialized in the narratives of middle length, *Nalini* (1911), *Leela* (1914), *Chintavishtayaya Sita* (1919), *Duravastha* (1922), *Chandalabhikshuki* (1923) and *Karuna* (1923) are eloquent testimony to Asan's powers of poetic concentration and dramatic contextualization. Occasionally the call of social pressures lured him to try a different strain, as in "Reflections of a Thiyya Boy".

Why shouldst thou wail, then, O Bharat?
Thy slavery is thy destiny, O Mother!
Thy sons, blinded by caste, clash among themselves
And get killed; what for is freedom, then?

Asan is often described as the poet of love; many writers have written about love, but Asan's love is of a transcendental kind and in poem after poem, *Nalini*, *Leela*, *Chandalabhikshuki*, he demonstrates it. For him it was identical with ultimate and absolute freedom, as he explains it in "The Song of Freedom". In *Sita*, his reflections, on love turn a bit bitter as the situation perhaps deserves it. In *Duravastha* it achieves a slight transformation, since he tries to seek love's meaning in terms of contemporary reality. It is set against the historical background of the Moplah Rebellion, but Asan the poet is basically concerned with the establishment of the idea that all men belong to the same caste and same religion, as he was taught by Sri Narayana Guru. Here is a representative passage from *Duravastha*, which reveals the social reformer and prophet in Asan:

Wake up, O you gardeners,
Wake up and toil, spring is at hand.

In this garden enriched by beautiful blossoms
On high boughs and low,
Remember there is not a single flower
Which does not delight the Lord.
Come forward--

And replace the laws,
Or else they are sure to displace you.
There is a raging wind
Unceasingly reverberating with this utterance in today's Kerala.
Time from all the four directions declares the self-same thing;
And even the earth beneath your feet resounds with the din of unrest.

Asan as a poet was a great synthesizer. He wrote two major poems on Buddhist legends, *Chandalabhikshuki* and *Karuna* (Compassion) They were his last works, written before his untimely death in 1924, Love, Freedom and Equality are his basic concerns. The last lines of *Karuna* sum up all these in concrete, context-based terms:

Salutations to thee, O Upagupta, without getting lost
In 'nirvana' come back again to serve the world.

Mother Earth today needs more of such sons as you whose
compassion reaches the lowliest and lost.

Asan's career illustrates in full the changes that were taking place in the Malayalam poetry of his time. His earliest works were mainly hymns employing Sanskritized diction and Sanskrit metres. With *Veena Poovu* (1907) his sensibility registers a change: the diction is simplified, and although Sanskrit metres are used, they have a closeness by now to the easy and flowing Dravidian metres. The pessimistic note is replaced by a more strident note in some of the later poems. The use of a focal character - most of such characters are women like Nalini in *Nalini* and Sita in the poem named after her - as protagonist helps to dramatize the whole experience of the poem. In the shorter poems and in *Prarodanam*, an elegy with a splendid and resonant orchestration, the style fluctuates, but in his last three poems Dravidian metres are used, the diction is simple and natural. *Karuna* is the culminating point of this trend.

Ulloor Parameswara Iyer (1877 - 1949)

Ulloor, the second of the grand poetic trinity of the 20th century renaissance in Malayalam, started his career as a poet under the tutelage of

Kerala Varma Valiya Koyitampuran. He was a pastmaster in all the traditional games of classical poetry. He even excelled as the writer of a mahakavya by choosing a story from early Kerala history. *Umakeralam*, his mahakavya, is a work of great devotion: devotion to the land, to the language, to a poetic tradition and to high moral values. He wrote, like Asan and Vallathol, a number of short narratives or khandakavyas, of which the most famous are *Karnabhooshanam* and *Pingala*. In the former he celebrates Karna's infinite generosity and dedication to principles. In the latter he tries to portray the transformation of a courtesan overnight into a pious and refined character - almost a saint. Uloor also wrote quite a large number of lyrics and shorter pieces, now available in various collections. They cover a wide range from eulogies to kings and friends to the poetry of social commitment (for example, arguing for Temple Entry for low-caste Hindus).

Uloor was perhaps the most classical and the least romantic of the three poets. One could say either that the romantic in him was stifled by the authoritarian classicist or that the classicist in him was trying to pass for a romantic to suit the changing tastes of the time. It must be remembered that Uloor was one of the first of our fullfledged poets to achieve the benefits of formal education upto the post-graduate level from a University. He was thus exposed to the influence of English poetry through class-room instruction. Asan and Vallathol had only informal contact with English poetry. Neither of them could have, on the basis of their training, written a work like Uloor's monumental *History of Kerala Literature*. But Asan through self-study and Vallathol partly by his native gift and partly through indirect channels, became imbued with the spirit of romanticism. All the three began as classicists, graduated into romanticism and finally peeped into realism. All of them wrote their best poems during the second phase. Uloor cultivated the classical lyric with its severe discipline over the structure and its ultimate didactic motivation. He could say with Wordsworth that he was a teacher or nothing. But we know that in his best poems, Wordsworth could not keep up his declared intention of being a teacher. What was important was that the reader should be enabled to experience in full, the wonder and excitement that was the source of inspiration for the poem itself; Uloor is interested not in the communication of that experience through the senses,

but in distilling the abstract moral value of that experience. Thus even in his best lyrics he adds almost mechanically like Coleridge at the end of *The Ancient Mariner*, a moral. Being suspicious of his subjective evaluation, he would invoke some value approved of by the masters of the past. His master was Sri Harsha, not Kalidasa. Thus in *Annum Innum* (Then and Now), after glorifying the past and visualizing a bright future in glowing, eloquent terms, he adds the last quatrain which is an exhortation to the people of India. "India will become the Paradise it was once, O Indians, if we, pure in body and mind, lift ourselves through hard work". The sensuous experience presented earlier does not, according to him, make it valid enough. There are times when Uloor could rise to the heights of lyricism for short flights: in *Bhoothakkannadi* (Microscope) he writes:

“The desire to rise seen in the flying fireflies,
The enthusiasm brimming within the singing cuckoo
To offer worship to other beings,
The skill of the full-blown flowers to entice the entire world,
The expertise of the jumping bird to move its feet . . .
I have read ambrosia-like suggestive poetry even in mere rust,
I have heard with my ear sweet veena sounds even in silence”.

Uloor's idea of transcendental love is clearly brought out in his *Prema Sangeetam* (The Music of Love) which concludes with the poet's total self-dedication to God.

O Thou, Spirit Eternal!
Approached through devotion,
Who can ever see Thee
That has not eyes tinted with Universal Love?
What is happiness for others
Is my happiness, indeed;
What is sorrow for others
Is my sorrow, too:
Thou and I and others:
Are not all these the same in truth?

At your beck and call
Are my body and soul:
Shape them, day and night,
Both for others' sake;
O Lord, I salute Thee!

Vallathol Narayana Menon (1878-1958)

Vallathol's training was in classicism but his native genius was romantic. The spirit of a renaissance was in the air and Vallathol breathed it in sumptuously. He took part in all the neoclassical games of poetry and even wrote a *mahakavya*, but his reputation today is firmly based on his middle length narratives like *Bandhanasthanaya Anirudhan* (Anirudhan in Prison: 1914), *Sishyanum Makanum* (Disciple and Son: 1918), *Magdalanamariam* (Mary Magdalene: 1921) and shorter lyrics contained in the early volumes of *Sahityamanjari* (Literary Anthology : Part-I (1916), Part-II (1918) and Parts-III and IV (1924). He was the most sensuous of the three poets, most at home in the description of the world we live in and the life we live. National consciousness, set afloat by the Indian National Congress and men like Gokhale, Tilak and Gandhi, gave a contemporary relevance to his poems extolling India's past glory. In poems like *Puranangal* (The Puranas), *Karmabhoomiyude Pinchukal* (The Little Foot of India), *Ente Gurunathan* (My Master), *Pora Pora* (Not enough, Not enough) and numerous other lyrics, Vallathol gave chiselled expression to this newly awakened nationalism both in political and cultural terms.

But perhaps more than these poems with a political orientation and an immediate cultural relevance, his poems about the less spectacular aspects of every day life in Kerala villages will have a lasting value. To the people of his own generation, every word he wrote about Indian culture was a fresh revelation of the nationalist spirit. After 1925 perhaps some of these less inspired poems could not make their appeal as effectively as before. But Vallathol had plenty of other arrows in his quiver and other strings to his bow. He could describe a Kerala landscape more imaginatively than most earlier poets. He could portray women characters in short poems

with considerable effect like Usha in *Bandhanashanaya Anirudhan*, Mariam in *Magdalanamariam*, Radha in *Radhayude Kritharthata* (Radha's Consolation), Sakuntala in *Acchanum Makalum* (Father and Daughter), etc. Usha for instance, defends herself and her lover with no trepidation during the encounter with her father's Minister, she says.

I sent for him and got him here.
My beloved did not come of his own accord
What is this the sense of justice in Bali's tribe,
Heaping all blames on one, the other kept as kin?

It is interesting to note that Asan, Ulloor and Vallathol could do ample justice to their heroines, while their heroes are allowed to pale into relative meekness and insignificance. Only Karna in Ulloor's *Karnabhooshanam* could be thought of as an exception.

One of Vallathol's perfect achievements is a dramatic poem based on the Puranic story of Viswamithra and Sakuntala (*Acchanum Makalum*) Written with the maximum concentration and close attention to every syllable, this dramatic narrative reads like a scene left out by Kalidasa in his *Sakuntalam* to be written during his 20th century incarnation. The scene is the meeting between Viswamitra and his long-lost daughter Sakuntala, now staying at the hermitage of Kasyapa with her little son Sarvadamana, after being repudiated and rejected by her lord, King Dushyanta in a fit of forgetfulness. Seeing that his daughter has been unjustly repudiated by Dushyanta, Viswamitra, notorious for his sudden and uncontrollable outbursts of fury, threatens to invoke a drastic curse upon the criminal king. The scene could easily remind the reader of a possible *Kathakali* setting in which the situation would be presented with tremendous effect. Vallathol was also deeply interested in the resuscitation of this ancient Kerala art of dance-drama, its resources are indirectly exploited in full in *Accchanum Makalum*. Here is the scene in the poet's own words:

The mighty Viswamitra had started uttering
these words, placing his right arm clenched
in anger, on his chest.

.....
If only he were to fling it forward
it would spell the end!--

It will become the thunderball that would
annihilate her husband with his entire race.

Fully aware of that dread consequence, she instantly
clutched that dread missile of destruction
with both her hands and cried:

“Father, for my sake, forbear! Let not your
Daughter become the destroyer of her husband!
Let her not be consumed by the fire of dire widowhood!

Abandoned earlier by her parents once,
She has now been abandoned freely
By her husband too, that is all;

Let my life be completely destitute,-
But let not my son too become an outcast
on account of my sin!”.

The fire of his anger having been quenched
By the tears of his daughter
The father, now feeling extremely happy,
commended her.

“Fare thee well Your goodness had pulled me out of moral ruin;
May you, along with your son, soon join your lord!”

(Translation by Kainikkara Kumara Pillai)

Magdalanamariam is a dramatic rendering of the spiritual conversion of a professional courtesan into the Christian way of life through prayer and penance. This was perhaps the first time an episode from a western source (the Bible, in this case) was exploited in this way by a Malayalam poet. Vallathol, no doubt, orientalizes the whole setting. Christ is almost identified with Krishna, thus the East and the West (one could of course argue that Christ was more oriental than occidental) are made to

meet in the ecstatic realm of poetry. Vallathol could not shake off his national heritage and he was more at home in poems like *Acchanum Makalum*, *Sishyanum Makanum* and *Kochu Sita*. His shorter lyrics in *Sahitya Manjari* are a veritable store-house of memorable word-pictures. *Bhakityum Vibhakityum*, *Prabhatageetam*, *A Walk in the Rain*, *A Boat Journey*, *Bharatapuzha* and *A Picture* are examples of Vallathol's special talent in evoking a kind of country music by the perfect disposition of word and image. As against the political poet, here we have the real spokesman of Indian culture, the genuine lover of nature, the perfect wielder of words. In other areas he could be imitated and even surpassed; here he was supreme without an equal.

Literary Criticism: Western Influence

The influence of Western literary models is most clearly seen in the field of criticism. The attempt to relate old Indian values to new western values will account for most of the developments in literature in the first half of the 20th century. The rapid growth of prose through journals like *Bhashaposhini* (started 1896) inevitably led to the new trend in criticism, viz., the evaluation of literary works in Malayalam on the basis of Western critical standards. This tendency which existed in its rudimentary form in Kerala Varma became more systematic in A.R. Rajaraja Varma. It found its full-throated spokesman in Sahitya Panchananan P.K. Narayana Pillai (1878-1937). His critical treatises on Cherusseri, Ezhuthachan, Kunchan Nambiar and Unnayi Warriar are the best monuments to this creative encounter between two traditions of criticism. Close interpretation of what is there in the text, attempts to investigate into problems of authorship and chronology and to relate what is in a work to socio-religious developments and historical setting at the time of composition, application of documentary evidence to textual problems and final judgement based on total evaluation rather than on *alankara* and diction: these were the general features of his best critical writings. One could say that he promoted judicial criticism. The use of quotations from Sanskrit alongside those from English is proof to show that his aim was a sort of synthesis of the East and the West. His third lecture on Thunchathu Ezhuthachan begins thus.

Since there could be difference of opinion about the vedantic passages in *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilipattu* as shown before, I would not like to erect Ezhuthachan's pillar of fame on such a foundation. More secure bases other than that are not difficult to find. No one need hesitate to say that the *Bhakti Rasa* sparkling throughout that work and the skill in the use of language are unique to it. Although it is possible to see many other *Rasas* like *Sringara* (erotic) *Vira* (heroic) and *Karuna* (tragic) clearly demonstrated in it, there is something special about the *Bhakti Rasa*. No other *Rasa* seems to have bestirred him as deeply as *Bhakti Rasa*.

While this shows the application of the Indian aesthetic theory of *Rasa*, we have in the following passage, the application of western ideas:

It is the good fortune of the people of Kerala that in Ezhuthachan, who is to be regarded as the founding- preceptor of Malayalam literature, there is a strong bias towards ethics, *Rasas* are born of emotions and emotions are the tools of the trade for the poets. I remember Benedito Croce, the Italian critic, as having said somewhere as follows. "The poets transform the subjects they deal with into ideal goals. It is done not through the silly tricks of tropes, but through a total involvement. And in this way we pass from a state of emotional excitement into one of quiet reflection. 'How well this remark suits Ezhuthachan's poetry'!".

P.K. Narayana Pillai's critical credo is clearly expressed in the preface he wrote to his monograph on Ezhuthachan.

"It is said that we are so much encumbered about with the evergrowing pile of contemporary literature that we seldom find time to make or renew acquaintance with old masters of the pen. The reason of the likely neglect of old masters, according to one view, is that unless we are introduced to them by men of our own time, we may not recognize them. Every age requires the past to be interpreted to it in terms of its own ideas".

The classicist in P.K. Narayana Pillai seems to agree with the classicist in T.S. Eliot who came to hold an almost similar view about the need to interpret the past afresh to each age.

Swadeshabhmani K. Ramakrishna Pillai (1878-1916), the stormy petrel of Travancore politics, was also imbued with the western influence, but he did not care for a judicial approach. Instead he spoke out loud and clear and at times with virulence, giving no quarter to the author he criticised. His political radicalism and training as a journalist aided him in this. His short biography of Karl Marx, is the first work of socialist thought in Malayalam. He also wrote books on Socrates, Columbus, Franklin and Gandhi. His *Vrithanta Patra Pravartanam* (1912) is a pioneering work of journalism and consistent with lofty idealism even lays down a severe code of conduct for the aspiring journalist. He had become editor of *Swadeshabhmani* in 1906) and was exiled from Travancore in 1910). He held the view that style was born of the writer's character and could-not be earned through imitation. The truth of this is borne out by his own style, as for instance in his virulent attack on kingship:

The monarchs believe and force others to believe that they are God's representatives or incarnations. This is absurd. Did God create a special kind of dog to be the king of dogs, or a special kind of elephant to rule over all elephants?

There were many other critics like C. Anthappayi who tried to assimilate the western critical modes.

Drama and the Stage

In the history of drama too, we find the Indian tradition trying to adjust itself to the growing influence of European drama. The Portuguese brought into Kerala their miracle plays which supplied the inspiration for *Chavittunatakam*. One of the earliest examples of this type is *Genoa* (date not known). Among the historical plays that followed were *Caralman Charitram* and *Napoleon Charitram*. These plays however did not influence Malayalam literature in any way. The first translation of a Shakespearean

play came out in 1866 (*Almarattam* from *A Comedy of Errors*). Dramatic literature proper began with Kerala Varma's translation of *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* (1881-1882). This was a popular hit. It also led to numerous other translations, few of which were put on stage. C.V. Raman Pillai's *Chandramukhivilasam* (1885), Kochunni Thampuran's *Kalyani Kalyanam* (1888), K.C. Kesava Pillai's *Lakshmi Kalyanam* (1893), Kandathil Varghese Mappila's *Ebrayakutty* (1894) as well as *Kalahinidamanakam* (from Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*) and Kocheepan Tharakan's (1861-1940) *Mariamamma* (published in 1903, the author claims 1878 as the date of composition) were major landmarks in the growth of Malayalam drama.

C.V.'s *Chandramukhivilasam* is a combination of Sanskrit elements and western elements, *Mariamamma* dramatizes the characteristically Christian domestic problem of the conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. It is a play clearly modelled on western social problem play in prose interspersed with quatrains in verse. The use of dialect is realistic and effective. C.V. Raman Pillai returned to the stage in 1909 with *Kurupillakalari*, a prose comedy in the manner of Goldsmith and Sheridan. It was a very effective social satire. The henpecked husband and the westernized English educated lady are satirized in the play. C.V.'s later dramatic works included *Thentanamkottu Harischandran* (1914), *Kaimalassante Kadassikkai* (1915), *Pandathe Patchan* (1918) and *Butler Pappan* (1921). These are basically farces with an emphasis on social satire. His real contribution to drama perhaps consists of dramatizations of his famous historical novels: they are among the best historical plays still put on stage. K.P. Karuppan's *Balakaleswam* (1914) is a play with a message, although traditional in form. The traditional kind of verse used in it may be said to give an added sharpness to its social criticism. It advocates progressive measures of social reform in unmistakable terms and calls upon the government to put an end to caste practices by law and to promote the education and upliftment of the lower classes. It is prophetic in this sense and provoked bitter opposition at the time.

E.V. Krishna Pillai (1895-1938) inherited from C.V. Raman Pillai the tradition of social comedy on the one hand and historical tragedy on the other. E.V.'s native comic gift was put to good use in his *Pranayakkammishan*

(1932), B.A. *Mayavi* (1933) and *Vivahakammattam* (1934). Himself an actor, he could exploit devices of stage presentation effectively. The serious side of his personality found expression in his historical tragedies. *Sitalakshmi* (1926), *Raja Kesava Dasan* (1930) and *Iravikutty Pillai* (1934). They are really the dramatic counterpart to C.V. Raman Pillai's fictional representation of history. E.V.'s comic legacy was pursued by N.P. Chellappan Nair, M.G. Kesava Pillai and T.N. Gopinathan Nair. His tragic heritage was sustained and improved upon by Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai with his *Velu Thampi Dalava* and *Kalvariyyile Kalpapadapam* (1934), Kappana Krishna Menon with his *Cheraman Perumal* and *Pazhassi Raja*, Kainikkara Kumara Pillai with his *Harishchandran* (1934), *Mohavum Muktiyum* (1938) and Kuttanad Ramakrishna Pillai with his *Taptabashpam* (1934). The part played by Sree Chithira Thirunal Vayanassala, Thiruvananthapuram, in promoting the writing of new plays every year for the annual performance on the Maharaja's birthday is very significant in this regard, although on many occasions it had to be satisfied with second-rate or third rate plays. But it has kept up the longest continuous tradition in amateur acting in Thiruvananthapuram: a rare achievement in itself.

The most important theatre arts in Kerala have always had their devoted audience in the villages. There in the open air the ritualistic arts like *Padayani*, *Theyyam*, *Kakkarassi*, *Poothamkali* and *Poorakkali* are still attracting large crowds. The classical performing arts received a big boost in the present century with the founding of Kerala Kala Mandalam by the poet Vallathol. *Attakkathas* continue to be written on old subjects as well as new ones. The purists and the traditionalists do not quite favour the widening of the range of the *Kathakali* repertoire. Changes nevertheless are taking place, however imperceptible they may be at the time. Drama on the western model has always had to face an implicit challenge from these traditional performing arts with a hoary heritage behind them. In more recent times the cinema may appear to be a threat, but these challenges should be a source of inspiration for the dramatist committed to his vocation. The influence of Tamil musicals and their Malayalam adaptations or imitations was keenly felt in the 1920's and 1930's. It is perhaps a legacy from the tremendously popular *Sangitanaishadham* (1892) of T.C. Achutha Menon (1870-1942) and the later *Balagopalam* (1920) of Kuttamath Kunjukrishna

Kurup. The musical drama version of Kumaran Asan's *Karuna* was also a very popular play on the commercial stage. This tradition may be said to continue still, occasionally with an overdose of spicy humour or with a leftist-oriented political message.

Malayalam drama underwent a significant development in the 1930's. It may be said to have started with the discovery of Ibsen. A. Balakrishna Pillai, one of the major critics of the period, translated Ibsen's *Ghosts* into Malayalam in 1936 and wrote articles about him to popularize the kind of drama that Ibsen seemed to stand for. In 1940 C. Narayana Pillai translated *Rosmersholm*. This trend merged with the new movement which had already made some advances in Malabar. That drama was no mere entertainment, that it was a strong means of social awakening and that serious drama could make a powerful appeal to the audience: these truths were demonstrated by two plays based on the *Brahmin* community in Malabar. *Adukkalayilninnu Arangathekku* (From the Kitchen to the Scene of Action; 1930) by V.T. Raman Bhattathiripad, traces the history of the liberation of the Namboothiri women. It was an epoch-making play, mainly because of its ideological thrust. *Ritumati* (The Nubile Maiden 1939) by M.P. Bhattathiripad continued the movement. K. Damodaran's *Pattabakki* (Rental Arrears; 1938) is our first play on a socio-political theme. It is out and out propagandist, yet has an important difference from the conventional type of commercial drama without any serious thought in it. The forties were thus ready for a real take-off. New playwrights like N. Krishna Pillai, Pulimana Parameswaran Pillai, Edasseri Govindan Nair and C.J. Thomas brought into the stage in Kerala the much-needed seriousness of genuine tragedy through the front door itself. N. Krishna Pillai had declared his intentions as a playwright in categorical terms. "the ideal play, as far as I am concerned, is one in which some serious and fundamental human problem is realistically analysed and handled with the utmost concentration, avoiding wastage in words, dialogues, situations and characters. This ideal was instilled in me by Ibsen whom I consider to be the most successful master dramatist of the modern age and hence have attempted to emulate, with discrimination, his dramatic form and technique in my plays".

Krishna Pillai's major works are *Bhagnabhavanam* (Shattered Home: 1942), *Kanyaka* (The Virgin 1944) and *Balabalam* (The Trial of Strength 1946) Pulimana Parameswaran Pillai's *Samathva wadi* (The Socialist: 1944) is a precocious work; it employs the expressionist device with consummate skill. Edasseri Govindan Nair's *Koottukrishi* (Joint Farming: 1950) emphasised the value of rustic realism. A new dimension to the serious problem play was given by C.J. Thomas in his *Avan Veendum Varunnu* (He Comes Again). It is a work that anticipates the later development of Malayalam drama. C.J. Thomas' experimental urge achieves its magnificent fulfilment in his *Crime 27 of 1128* (1952-1954). A challenge to directors and actors, *Crime* is unique among Malayalam dramas. Before Beckett and Ionesco became known as writers of the *Absurd Theatre* and without proclaiming himself to be the founder of any school, C.J. Thomas gave total expression to his concept of drama-neither-tragedy nor comedy alone, but both at the same time, each seeking its justification in the other. C.J. Thomas was to write one more tragedy, *Aa Manushyan Nee Thanne* (Thou Art That Man), a dramatization of the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba. This pattern of epic dramas on puranic themes was taken up by C.N. Sreekantan Nair after his first attempts the social drama. The fifties and early sixties were the period of stage musicals, often with a pronounced socio-political bias. Thoppil Bhasi, N.N. Pillai, K.T. Mohammed, G. Sankara Pillai and Kavalam Narayana Panicker, among others, have kept the theatre active and meaningful during the post-independence period.

Poetry: The Second Generation of Romantics

Of the three poets, Asan, Ulloor and Vallathol, it was Vallathol the youngest that attracted the largest following in his life-time and enjoyed the greatest popularity. Among those who were close to him in style are Nalappatt Narayana Menon, Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nair, K.M. Panikkar, G. Sankara Kurup, Pallathu Raman, Bodheswaran, Vennikulam Gopala Kurup, P. Kunjiraman Nair, Palai Narayanan Nair, M.P. Appan and Balamani Amma. Nalappatt Narayana Menon (1887-1955) is mainly remembered for his classic elegy on the death of his wife, *Kannuneer Tulli* (Tear Drop), one of the best meditative lyrics in Malayalam. Like the English elegiac poets, he

is prompted to speculate on the meaning of life by the experience of bereavement:

Infinite, inscrutable and ineffable.
The route on which spins this cosmic globe;
What does man know of its true meaning,
Who looks at it from an obscure corner?

This philosophical strain which is an undercurrent of romantic poetry makes Nalappatt Narayana Menon closest to Asan; of all the poets in the Vallathol school, Kuttippurathu Kesavan Nair (1883-1959) in his poem *Grameena Kanyaka* (The Village Maid) wrote about the simple joys of the rural society that were threatened by the prospect of urbanization. Pallathu Raman (1892-1950) mainly wrote poems of social revolt, K.M. Panikkar (1895-1963), also a historian in English and a novelist in the C.V. tradition, came under the influence of the early Vallathol and wrote poems in several genres.

G. Sankara Kurup (1900-1978), brought up in the classicist tradition of Ulloor and Vallathol, fell early under the influence of Rabindranath Tagore and emerged as one of the major voices in the 1930's. He passed through various stages of evolution marked by movements such as mysticism, symbolism, realism and also socialist realism. Among his major lyrical and meditative poems are *Nakshatragitam* (Song of the Star), *Suryakanthi* (The Sunflower), *Innu Njan Nale Nee* (Today I, Tomorrow Thou), *Nimisham* (The Moment) and *Viswadarsanam* (The Cosmic Vision). They are all imbued with a spiritual earnestness which often brings him closer to the poetry of Kumaran Asan. His dramatic monologue *Perumthachan* (The Master Carpenter), is one of the successful poems in that genre in Malayalam.

Vennikulam Gopala Kurup (1902-1980) has stayed more or less within the Vallathol frame-work, but has achieved some fine effects in his best poems about scenes in everyday life. P. Kunhiraman Nair (1909-1978) was an indefatigable champion of the native tradition of life and an unwearied admirer of the beauty of Kerala landscape. Nalappatt Balamoni Amma is the greatest poetess Kerala has produced so far. She is equally good at

domestic themes and at speculative philosophy. Her longer monologues based on Parasurama, Viswamitra, Mahabali and Vibhishana add a new dimension to Vallathol's portrayals of puranic characters and episodes.

Two poets, Edappally Raghavan Pillai and Changmpuzha Krishna Pillai, brought in a new breath of life into the Malayalam poetry of the 1930's. Edappalli Raghavan Pillai (1909-1936), one of the true inheritors of unfulfilled renown among modern Malayalam poets, brought out and emphasized the finer elements which were often muted in the poems of the Vallathol School. His poetry reminds us of a vibrant melody played on a single string instrument. Before he committed suicide in 1936 he wrote a few excellent lyrics in the purer romantic strain with no hangover from neoclassicism. The close alliance between nature and the poet's mood of the moment is a recurring theme in his work, as in the following lines from *Prateeksha* (Hope):

Come away, come away, my bird of hope;
Darkness is spreading everywhere!
Singing its last song, to the west
Has flown the golden bird of twilight;
In the flower garden of the night
Already the jasmine buds of tonight have blossomed.
The last flickering smile of the lotus
Has melted into the twilight glow;
The cuckoo, tired of its singing,
Is asleep on the tree in the yard.
My bird of hope, wandering somewhere
In the heavens, please come away!

The double-distilled essence of romantic lyricism, tender and delicate and wistful: never before or after in the history of Malayalam poetry has it been captured in words. Edappalli Raghavan Pillai has been compared by A. Balakrishna Pillai to Leopardi of Italy: the brooding melancholy of an autumnal afternoon lingers over the poems of both. Raghavan Pillai's best poem is perhaps *Maninadam* (The sound of the bells) which ends with a quiet prayer:

Will each drop of my blood
Dripping from my heart's broken wall
Tired of the repeated batterings
Of the rough rubbles of insult
Inspire the pen that writes love songs?
And if it does, will it be effective?

His companion Changampuzha Krishna Pillai (1911-1948) met the same challenge of life with greater resilience. But deep down in him too there glowed an incurable idealism which saw the world in primary colours. In a 'statement' in verse prefixed to his first volume *Bashpanjali* (Tearful Offerings; 1934) he said:

Maybe it's right - this world
May be a source of unique joys;
May be a wave in the milky sea
Of the life of power and pomp:
Unlucky that I'am, whatever I saw
Was shrouded in pain!
Whatever fell upon my ears
Was the cry of pity!
Whatever my burning soul suffered
Were sighs, deep and hot.

Changampuzha's most popular work is a pastoral play in verse called *Ramanan*. It is a dramatization of the life and death of Raghavan Pillai presented in idealized terms. Its romantic melodies have captured the loveliness of the landscape of Kerala with its evergreen trees and its numerous rivers. With Changampuzha, Malayalam poetry comes directly under the influence of world poetry other than English too. He was a prolific writer with an ever-widening readership. He was susceptible to different kinds of influence from time to time: he has written poems both extolling vedic culture and condemning it vehemently; he has denounced socialism and has hailed Marx. These contradictions exist only on the intellectual plane. The magic of his poetry subsumes all these paradoxes. His last collection of poems *Swararagasudha* (1948) represents his art at its most

mature. “Rakkilikal” (Night birds: 1946) is in the form of a duet recited by a young man and a young woman calling upon the sleeping world to awaken to a new day, better and brighter than ever before. “Manaswini” (Woman with a generous heart: 1947) is an autobiographical poem in which the poet pays his homage in glowing words

As my heart, reflecting on you,
Melts and dissolves in a reverie,
My soul, urged by some ecstasy,
Is thrilled through and through
Pain, pain, intoxicating
Pain: let me drench myself in it!
Drench myself; and from within me
Let a soft strain of the flute flow.

Changampuzha passed away in 1948 and with that the magic world of romanticism too came to an end. In the thirties and forties, realism had threatened to creep into Malayalam poetry, but never could raise its head very high, Edasseri Govindan Nair was one of the first poets to use a non-romantic diction and talk about the problems of life with precision and sharpness. Rural life and industrial life appear in his poems (Puthenkalavum, Arivalum (The new pot and the sickle); “Panimudakku” (Strike) in naked, unadorned and not-too-musical verse. Changampuzha’s protest songs were so mellifluous that they often lulled both the rebel and his opponent into the luxury of a daydream. Edasseri made the rebel think and understand, before rushing into a fury of violence. Through him Malayalam poetry learned to shed some colourful but unhealthy encrustations and speak the language of truth as in “Bury the griefs in a pit and let us take a leap to power”.

Vyloppilli Sreedhara Menon (1911-1985) is perhaps the last of our major links with Vallathol. He survived the flood tide of the poetry of Changampuzha, his exact contemporary. He started publishing collections late and in the late forties and fifties he wrote some of his very best poems. He had once declared himself to be a “poet of beauty”, but later extended the meaning of the word “beauty” to cover all aspects of life. His poetry gained in depth and complexity in the years that followed. His most popular

poem is “Mampazham” (Ripe Mango), a very early work illustrating the Wordsworthian view that children are prophets. Among his more mature works are “Sahyante Makan” (Son of the Western Ghats) presenting with sympathy and understanding the troubled thoughts of a temple elephant in the process of going crazy and running amuck. The romantic strain is not absent in him, for example “Oonjalimel” (On the Swing), but it does not lead to uncontrolled outbursts or torrential overflow or loose meanderings. He always exercises severe control over his matter and manner; seldom does he tolerate sentimentality or melodrama. His most ambitious poem is perhaps *Kudiyozhikkal* (Eviction), a kind of lyrical-dramatic narrative in which the poet tries to dramatize his own ambivalence vis-a-vis the community at large and to clarify the role of the poet in a world of changing values.

The Edappalli school continued for a little while in the fifties as in the works of P. Bhaskaran. But the Edasserri line got strengthened with the coming into the scene of N.V. Krishna Warriar (1916-1989) author of *Neenda Kavitalakal* (Long Poems) and *Kochuthomman*, Akkitham Achuthan Nambudirri, author of *Irupatham Nootandinte Itihasam* (The Epic of the Twentieth Century) and Olappamanna, author of *Nangemakutty*.

Fiction in the Foreground

In the wake of the western novel came the western short story. The stories in the puranas or in works like *Panchatantra* could not give rise to a modern form of short fiction. When English came to influence the prose style, it also led to the use of prose for story telling. Among the earliest practitioners of the short story in Malayalam are Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar (1861-1915), Ambadi Narayana Poduval (1871-1936), Murkot Kumaran (1874-1941), K. Sukumaran (1876-1956) and M.R.K.C. or Chenkulath Kunhirama Menon (1882-1940). In the place of a native tradition of story-telling, they developed a new mode by incorporating the western narrative tradition. But the stories of these early decades of the 20th century were quaint accounts of episodes, their main purpose seems to have been to provide entertainment to the literate population. But the short story began to forge ahead in the 1930's. A new generation of writers were just waiting in

the wings when the Sahitya Parishath was launched in 1927 in the place of the old Kavisamajam started in 1892 and the later Bhashaposhini Sabha which had become defunct. The best link between the older writers of the short story and the new generation was E.V. Krishna Pillai, whose stories are collected in *Kelisoudham*. In 1937 the younger writers started a Jivat Sahitya Samiti which in 1944 grew into the Progressive Literature Association. Whatever limitations this movement may have had, the emphasis put on the realities of life and on the need to relate literature to contemporary problems had its salutary effect on the short story. Perhaps without this new awakening, the Malayalam short story would have remained where it was before. But in the new circumstances the short story got a boost. Some of the best talents went into this field.

Karur Neelakanta Pillai (1898-1974), P. Kesava Dev (1904-1983), Ponkunnam Varkey (b, 1908), Vaikom Muhammed Basheer (1912-1994) S.K. Pottekkat (1913-1982), Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (b, 1914), P.C. Kuttikrishnan (1915-1979), Lalithambika Antharjanam (1909-1987) and K. Saraswathi Amma (1919-1974) were among the masters of the new short story that began its brilliant career in the 1930's and achieved great heights in the next twenty years. Karur was a humanist to the core and even when he used satire he had his sympathies in the right quarters in the right proportion. The moralizing strain is completely muted in his best stories such as "Marappavakal" (Wooden Dolls), "Poovampazham" (Bananas) and "Mothiram" (The Ring), Compared with the stories of E.V. Krishna Pillai or Bhavathrathan Nambudiripad, the stories of Karur are finished products. His stories about the episodes in the life of a school teacher such as he was, are marked by selective realism and poignant pathos. He is, perhaps, the most economical of our short-story writers.

Kesava Dev began as a politically-oriented writer and his sympathies lay with the oppressed classes. He is often impatient about the aesthetic side. His view is that if the writer takes enough care about what he has to say, then technical excellence will automatically follow. Nevertheless, some of his early stories are quite moving because of their raw, unselfconscious craftsmanship. No one can write without craft and it is the regard for authenticity in artistic communication that makes a writer care for the way

communication is achieved. “Meenkaran Koran” (Koran, the fisherman) is a story that well reveals both Dev’s thematic obsessions and his technique of narration. Ponkunnam Varkey is also concerned with socio-political reality and his early stories are open attacks on the church. The attempt to bring to light the hidden motivations for outwardly pious actions is what Varkey is specially interested in in his stories which expose the foibles or cruelties of the church as an institution. His younger contemporary, Ponjikkara Raphy continued for a time, this tirade against the “tyranny” of the Catholic Church. Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, quite unlike Varkey, works by suggestion. He is also a social critic (here a critic of the weaknesses of the Islamic society in Kerala) but he does not shout or harangue like Dev and Varkey. He is closer to Karur in this respect. The master artist in him is fully revealed in stories like “Poovanpazham” (Banana), “Bhargavi Nilayam” and “*Muchittukalikaarante Makal*” (A gambler’s daughter). There is humour and pathos in several of his best stories.

S.K. Pottekkat is more interested in psychology than in social reality. His stories like “Stri” (Woman), “Vadhu” (The Bride) and “Nisagandhi” (Flower of the night) reveal this. The absence of a propagandist obsession enables him to use a poetic style. Some of the stories are laid in places outside Kerala. His romantic interests are reflected in the titles of his collection: *Indraneelam*, *Chandrakantham*, *Padmaragam*, (names of precious stones); “Rajamally”, “Kanakambaram”, “Nisagandhi” (names of flowers) Pulliman, Himavahini, Manimalika, Vanakaumudi (all words with rich associations).

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai started as a short story writer in the line of Guy de Maupassant who was probably introduced to him by A. Balakrishna Pillai. He has an unerring eye for the telling detail and in his best stories he makes this effect by using a simple unadorned style. Compared with him Pottekkat and Kuttikrishnan may be said to employ an ornate style, a “precious” diction and aim at special effects. In Thakazhi, the style is not an end in itself. We do not see it, as a matter of fact, we see through it. He is capable of clinical analysis and objective reporting in a neutral style. One of his popular early stories is “Vellappokkam” (Flood). His major themes concern the life of the peasants and the have nots. But it may be said that

under the influence of his French masters, there is an overdose of “naturalist” writing in the early stories, roughly in the manner of Zola.

Lalithambika Antharjanam and K. Saraswathi Amma are among the foremost women story tellers in Malayalam; they deal with the pieties of domestic life. Antharjanam’s stories are marked by her innate sympathy for people in distress. She has also a great deal of variety of themes, as exemplified by “Pancharayumma” (A sweet kiss) on the one hand and “Sathyathinte Swaram” (The Voice of Truth) on the other. The former is personal, subjective, domestic, delicate, lyrical, the other is tragic, social, public, harsh, dramatic. The problems of a Nambudiri household are also taken up at times, as in “Kuttasammatham” (Confession). Saraswathi Amma has a less sophisticated style. Her forthright analysis of man-woman relationship is not too common even in Western literature. The short stories of P.C. Kuttikrishnan present the interplay of the romantic and the realistic. Like Karur and Basheer; Kuttikrishnan also is capable of using humour as an undertone. It does not graduate into satire. He also reveals a unique insight into human nature. The psychology of the proletariat has seldom been portrayed better than in some of the early short stories of Ponjikkara Raphy, just as middle class life is vividly portrayed in the stories of Vettoor Raman Nair.

The development of the novel in the second quarter of the twentieth century is a close parallel to the growth of the short story as outlined above. Chandu Menon and C.V. Raman Pillai had established two lineages in the Malayalam novel. For a long while they were without any real following. They were imitated ad infinitum. Social and historical novels came out in large numbers. But there was no creative originality in any of them. Narayana Kurukkal (1861-1948) wrote *Parappuram* (during the 1890’s) and *Udayabhanu* during the 1900’s, which may be regarded as setting up a new genre, viz., the political novel, Virutan Sanku (Sanku, the smart fellow) by Karatt Achutha Menon (1867-1913) was written in 1913. Rama Varma Appan Thampuran (1876-1942) was the author among numerous other things the novel *Bhootharayar* (1923), Ambadi Narayana Poduval’s *Keralaputran* also deserves mention here. These were not major achievements. Thus it might be said that the course of extended prose fiction in Malayalam appeared to have come to an end.

It was then that in 1931 a work that was unique in many ways came out; it was *Apphante Makal* (Uncle's Daughter) by Bhavatratan Nambudiripad. Like V.T. Bhattathiripad's play *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekkku*, produced about the same time, this novel also had a profound social relevance. But apart from that, it was very readable story in prose, the characters were fully alive and the social situation, fully realized in the context of the novel.

The fresh awakening of the novel in the thirties was due to various factors such as the arrival on the scene of a new generation of writers, the demand for reading material for the newly literate, the exposure of Malayalam writers to the new vistas of Russian and French fiction through the writings of Balakrishna Pillai and a general interest among the people in matters social, political and cultural, which is also seen in our national life at the time. The forties and the early fifties were a busy period for the novelists as the following shows.

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| 1942 | <i>Odayil Ninnu</i> (Out of the Gutter, Kesava Dev) |
| 1944 | <i>Balyakala Sakhi</i> (Childhood friend; Basheer) |
| 1946 | <i>Nati</i> (Actress: Dev) |
| 1947 | <i>Sabdangal</i> (Voices: Basheer)
Thottiyude Makan (Scavenger's Son:Thakazhi) |
| 1948 | <i>Vishakanyaka</i> (Poison Maid: Pottekkat) |
| 1949 | <i>Randidangazhi</i> (Two Measures; Thakazhi)
Bhrantalayam (Mad House: Dev) |
| 1950 | <i>Arkuvendi</i> (For Whose Sake: Dev) |
| 1951 | <i>Entuppuppakkoranendarnnu</i>
(My Grandpa had an Elephant: Basheer) |
| 1955 | <i>Ummachu</i> (Kuttikrishnan) |
| 1956 | <i>Chemmeen</i> (Prawns; Thakazhi) |
| 1957 | <i>Pathummuyude Aadu</i> (Pattumma's Goat; Basheer) |
| 1958 | <i>Sundarikalum Sundaranrmarum</i> (Women and Men of Charm: Kuttikrishnan). |

It is clear from the above list that most of the time the same people wrote short stories and novels. Thus the early modern novel is no more than an extended short story, if the novelist does not appear on the stage and add his own comments and explanations, the novel would be still shorter. Thakazhi's early work *Pathitha Pankajam* (Fallen Lotus), Dev's *Odayil Ninnu*, Pottekkat's *Nadan Premam* (Country Love) and Basheer's *Balyakala Sakhi* are novels of this kind. Dev's *Nati* and Pottekkat's *Vishakanyaka* have graduated into what may be called the novel proper. Thus the modern novel in Malayalam is mostly a post-war-phenomenon. What is important here is that aspects of life which had never entered into literature before with sufficient force or depth, swept into it now, through these novels. The novel as a genre in the hands of these writers is purely a western transplantation; none of them has tried to evolve an indigenous form of prose narration. The influence of Chekhov, Maupassant, Gorky, Hugo, Tolstoy, Steinbeck, Knut Hamsun and perhaps Dostoevsky; the list can be lengthened. But it must however be granted that these novelists widened the range of our readers' interests and thus provided a much needed education in literary sensibility, Pappu, Chathan, Koran, Ummachu, Karuthamma, Majid, Suhra, Ouseph; they were all granted entry into the temple of Saraswati. The Pariah and the Nambudiri jostled shoulders in claiming the compassion and consideration of the reading public. And what is more, the novel was no more a mere means of entertainment, a decoration or an outgrowth. It was like life itself, as created by the artist's vision. In the fifties the novel became the most productive literary form; but sceptics continued to feel there was not yet any one to challenge. Chandu Menon nor any novel yet to stand comparison with *Ramaraja Bahadur*.

Literary Criticism

Among the forms of non-fiction prose that received a tremendous onward push in the modern period, was literary criticism. In the 1930's and 40's three names became most influential. A Balakrishna Pillai (1889-1960), Joseph Mundasseri (1901-1977) and Kuttikrishna Marar (1900-1973). Their critical writings are mostly interpretative rather than theoretical. In theory, they tried to draw upon literature in other languages. Balakrishna Pillai and Mundasseri mostly upon European literature, including Russian, while Marar

was mainly confined to and contented with vedic and classical, Sanskrit literature. Balakrishna Pillai wrote elaborate studies of the selected lyrics of Edappalli Raghavan Pillai, Changampuzha Krishna Pillai, G. Sankara Kurup Kedamangalam Pappukutty and works like Kerala Varma's *Mayurasandesam* and Thakazhi's *Thalayode* (skull). He had widely read in European literature, French, Russian, Italian etc., and often quoted from or referred to works in these languages for comparison and contrast with contemporary Malayalam literature. He was in a way responsible for the cultivation of the exotic in Malayalam literature. His obsession with the theoretical aspects of literary schools and movements, with archaeology and ancient history, with myth and psycho analysis and with literary genres and formalist criticism, helped fertilize the otherwise barren ground of literary criticism in Malayalam. At times he seemed to indulge in oversimplification and categorization, but even then he did help readers to look for specific elements in literary works. He was mainly responsible for the modernization of literary taste in Malayalam. Respect for contemporary classics seems to have been his watchword.

Joseph Mundasseri began his career as a critic by looking for a means of synthesizing Indian poetics with the insights of Western literary criticism. He was able to set forth some of these views in his early work *Kavya Peetika*. He applied these to the works of Kumaran Asan and tried to identify the elements of greatness in Asan's work. Thus, like Balakrishna Pillai, he was also bent upon interpreting and highlighting contemporary classics. His essays in *Manadandam*, show his interest in ancient classics like Kalidasa's *Meghadoot*. His controversial theory about Roopabhadrata - formal excellence - showed that he was not evaluating a work of art solely on the basis of the proclaimed aims of a writer. But he saw the artist fundamentally as a spokesman of his age. This established his position as the chief architect of the theory of progressive literature in the 1940's. He was ably supported by a host of other critics like M.S. Devadas, S. Guptan Nair and K. Damodaran. Mundasseri demonstrated the usefulness of the comparative method even in contemporary studies in *Mattoli* (Echo), although his conclusions were not always logical. He tried his hand occasionally at fiction, but his place in literature is basically that of a critic. He was master of a sonorous kind of prose, full of sanskritisms and involved

construction showing the influence of English syntax. He used this style to defend proletarian writing which employs the opposite kind of style.

Exactly opposed to the stand of Mudasseri was that of Kuttikrishna Marar, a champion of Indian classics and the values of classical criticism. He started his career as an interpreter-commentator of the works of Vallathol, but soon emerged into the arena fully armed to defend values which seemed to be threatened with extinction under the onslaughts of the progressivists. His elaborate critical study of *Mahabharata* from the point of view of a dedicated and enlightened classicist (*Bharataparyatanam*), his open avowal that critical impartiality is a misconception where values are at stake, his advocacy of art as life itself, as against art for life's sake, his wonderful penetration into the fundamental principles of spiritual and moral elements in literature enabled him to establish his position as a major critic although he did not know English well and did not have the benefits of western education.

As sober as Marar, but with all the erudition of A. Balakrishna Pillai and the social commitment of Mundasseri was M.P. Paul who, however, did not live long enough to do justice to his talents. His studies of literary genres, especially the short story and the novel, had a tremendous impact not only on critics, but on the novelists themselves. His attempt to study aesthetics as fundamental to the practice of literary criticism shows the influence of his English education. He had an easy, unaffected kind of middle style at his command, a prose free from the mannerisms of Mundasseri and the obscurantism of Balakrishna Pillai.

A number of essayists had contributed to the growth of prose and literary criticism in the forties and fifties. K.R. Krishna Pillai, R. Narayana Panikkar, P. Sankaran Nambiar, Sooranad Kunjan Pillai, Govindankutty Nair, Kainikkara Kumara Pillai and A.D. Harisarma are only a few of them. Among the writers of biographical and critical studies may be mentioned P.K. Parameswaran Nair (*Sahitya Panchananan*, C.V. Raman Pillai), K.M. George (*Sadhu Kochukunju, Jeevacharita Sahityam*), K. Bhaskaran Nair, (*Daivaneetikku Dakshinyam Illa*), N. Krishna Pillai (*Thiranjedutha Prabandhangal*) and P.K. Balakrishnan (*Narayanaguru, Tippu Sultan and Chandu Menon - A study*), Among the travelogues are

K.P. Kesava Menon's *Bilathivishesam* and numerous volumes by S.K. Pottakkat. There have been many great masters of humour, the most important of them are E.V. Krishna Pillai (1895-1938) and M.R. Nair (Sanjayan, 1903-1944). Sanjayan had a more serious face too. In *Sahityanikasham* are collected a number of brilliant pieces of literary criticism, which anticipate later developments in comparative literature studies. Among their followers are N.P. Chellappan Nair and P.K. Rajaraja Varma. The most important autobiographies in the language include those of P.K. Narayana Pillai (*Smaranamandalam*, 1938), E.V. Krishna Pillai (*Jeevithasmaranakal*; 1941), K.M. Panikkar (*Atmakatha* 1953), K.P. Kesava Menon (*Kazhinja Kalam*), Mundasseri (*Kozhinja Ilakal*) and C. Kesavan (*Jeevithasamaram*).

The informal essay has been enriched by the writings of E.V. Krishna Pillai (*Chiriyum Chintayum* in 2 parts. 1936), which are marked by satire. Sanjayan wrote social satire both in prose and in verse. The light essay has had a number of practitioners but they are mostly scattered in various periodicals. The tradition of Cherusseri and Kunchan Nambiar have been kept up by prose writers in our time. The literature of research has grown immensely, during the period. Among the histories of literature, the greatest monument is Ulloor's *Kerala Sahitya Charitram* which is a compendium of the history of Sanskrit literature in Kerala too. Dictionaries like Sreekanteswaram Padmanabha Pillai's monumental *Sabdataravali* have been followed by other more diversified ones. Books on science and technology and on different aspects of Gandhism and Marx have come out in recent times.

Journalism is a flourishing field and weeklies like *Mathrubhumi* and *Malayalarajyam* and monthlies like *Mangalodayam* used to cater to the tastes of the younger as well as the older generation of both readers and writers. The fifties began as a period of controversies set afloat by the progressive movement and its politicalization. Writers were often urged to take sides, and it was argued that not taking sides at all was itself taking a certain side. But amidst the din and noise of the polemics and the splash of slogans and catchwords and stereotyped formulas, it seems that efforts were being made somewhere for a powerful take-off after the fifties.

After Independence

Malayalam literature after independence has been making steady progress in almost all branches of literary endeavour. The influence of the poetic trinity (Asan, Ulloor, Vallathol) was on the wane, and new trends had taken roots even before the arrival of freedom. The period saw the continuation of neo-romanticism mixed with a touch of realism; the progressive movement with its commitment to realism and even naturalism, had dissipated with the Kollam conference because of internecine dispute between Communist party hardliners like E.M.S. Nambudiripad and writers like Kesava Dev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and Joseph Mundassery. There was a short period of confusion among writers committed to leftist ideology, but fiction, poetry and drama appeared to steer clear of these ideological muddles and emerge into a new phase, throwing away hackneyed preoccupations and forms of expression. The second half of the 20th century could thus be termed post-progressive, post-romantic or modernist. As in many other Indian languages, changes continued to take place in Malayalam too on a par with what was happening in most literatures of the world. The quarter of a century after independence is often referred to as the modernist phase, which for a time coincided with the left-over progressive-romantic trends. And the last quarter-century has sometimes been identified as the

post-modern phase. Just as independence ushered in modernism, certain political and social events, such as the Emergency (1975-77) helped the transition from modernism to post-modernism. While the emergence of no new movement marks a complete cut-off from the existing trends, there is a period of overlap, during which the dying past and the inchoate present face each other in an uneasy co-existence.

Poetry

Many of the senior poets at the coming of independence were still very productive with their mature works, marking the fruition of the tendencies that were visible in their early works. G. Sankara Kurup (1901-77) produced his magnum opus, “Vishwadarshanam,” at a time when some critics were arguing that the sprout of Malayalam poetry had stopped growing and that poetry had no future. He went on to write lyrical pieces like “Shivatandavam”(Dance of Shiva) and narratives like “Chandanakattil” (Sandalwood Bed). Petty-minded writers went on wondering whether Kurup was a poet at all, when he was chosen for the first ever Jnanpith Puraskar, which was an unpleasant surprise for them. P. Kunhiraman Nair (1906-78) too emerged from under the shadow of Vallathol and grew out of his early phase as a devotional poet; he too surprised his readers with new themes and striking imagery. Few poets have captured the beauty of Kerala’s land and landscape, people and nature, with such authenticity as he. He moved from place to place all through Kerala, looking for the vanished grace and wondrous beauty of yore. N. Balamani Amma (1909-2003), after writing brilliantly about mother and grandmother and the domestic virtues, produced a series of character studies, exploring the significance of puranic heroes like Parasurama, Vibhishana, Mahabali, Vishwamitra and others, and uncovering the hidden side of their prowess. Vyloppillil Sreedhara Menon (1911-85), whose first collection came out only in 1948, achieved his full glory during the post-independence years. His narrative piece “Kudiyozhikkal” (Eviction) was a breakthrough in understanding the psychology of the middle class in the Kerala setting. His shorter poems like “Oonjalil” (On the Swing), “Onappattukaar,” “Ujvalamuhurtam,” and

“Savitri,” reveal to the reader the quintessence of poetry in a variety of forms. Vennikulam Gopala Kurup, M.P. Appan, V.K. Govindan Nair and K.K. Raja were among the others who enriched Malayalam poetry in their own ways. Despite the difficult conditions of living, Appan always maintained a pleasant attitude to life. Palai Narayanan Nair (b. 1911) is the author of a series called *Keralam Valarunnu* (Kerala is Flourishing), tracing the growth and development of Kerala through myths, legends, history and social progress, in addition to several lyrical pieces with a romantic or realistic touch like *Amritakala* (The Immortal Crescent) and *Jeevitakahalam* (The Bugle of Life).

The dominant influence on young poets at mid-century, however, was that of Changampuzha Krishna Pillai (1911-48) with his irrepressible romantic poetic vision and exuberant style. After his death this trend survived in the poets of the neo-romantic school, some of whom cherished the language and sentiments already employed by Changampuzha. P. Bhaskaran, Thirunalloor Karunakaran, Vayalar Rama Varma, Puthusseri Ramachandran, O.N.V. Kurup, Punalur Balan and others tried to combine the neo-romantic sentiments with the ideas of social revolution. They may be said to have shared up to a time the ideology of leftist politics. In some ways this trend has continued to the end of the 20th century. Some of these writers later turned away from their earlier preoccupations, but the language and style remained without change. P. Bhaskaran (b.1924) was a Communist, went underground in 1946-47 and wrote his famous poem “Vayalar Garjikkunnu” (Vayalar Cries Out), celebrating the violent protest against autocracy in the village of Vayalar in erstwhile Travancore. Later he left the party and entered the film world, directing films and writing lyrics for the films, where he distinguished himself as a film-song writer. He wrote a few anti-communist poems like “Pretangalude Pattu” (The Chorus of the Dead). Like his popular film songs, his later poems also evoke soft sentiments about love and nostalgia. “Orkkuka Vallappozhum” (Remember at Times) is a collection of personal lyrics rich in emotion. His mature poems have a sober vision of life and perhaps a sombre understanding of man and his environs. Vayalar Rama Varma (1928-75) too was inspired by ideas of social revolution and

was for a time writing on the basis of leftist political ideology. He too gradually moved away from total commitment to politics and declared that “the sword is not my weapon of war” in his well-known poem “Sargasangitam” (The Song of Creation) His narrative poem *Ayisha* was of great popular appeal, though not obtrusively political. But his humanist fervour never subsided. Puthusseri Ramachandran (b.1928) and Punalur Balan (1929-87) too had their commitment to leftist politics, but did not stray into writing film lyrics. *Avunnathra Ucchathil* (At the Top of One’s Voice) is a collection of Puthusseri Ramachandran’s representative poems. Punalur Balan’s mature poems are collected in the volumes *Kottayile Pattu* (The Song at the Fort) and *Raman Raghavan*. Thirunallloor Karunakaran added a classical touch to his poems with a rural background partly due to his close knowledge Sanskrit classics. O.N.V. Kurup (b. 1931) also belonged to this group of erstwhile pink poets for a while, but his later poems have a significance beyond any group allegiance, as is seen in his “Chorunu” (The First Feed of Rice), “Nalumanippookkal” (Four O’Clock Flowers), “Suryagitam” (Ode to the Sun) and “Bhoomikkoru Charamagitam” (A Requiem for the Earth). Among his more ambitious works are the two narratives, *Ujjayini* and *Swayamvaram*, where he achieves an excellence not quite possible in the short lyric. From historical and puranic legends he recreates in his own mellifluous style men and women who are archetypal in stature.

The immediate post-independence scene in Malayalam literature presents a mixture of multiple visions and idioms: side by side with these neo-romantic trends there was another school that steered clear of the political claptrap and wrote about man as he was in everyday life, using a language that was as rugged as the life it wrote about. Edasseri Govindan Nair (1906-74) espoused a vision and a style that were diametrically opposed to those of the romantics and neo-romantics. He avoided poetic clichés, favoured common speech, had a dread of mellifluousness, cloying sentiments and hackneyed ideas—sometimes invoking a popular myth to give the poem a public dimension, as in “Poothappattu” (The Song of the Sprite) or an incident from contemporary life to project the significance of the ordinary,

as in “Puthenkalavum Arivalum” (The New Cooking Pot and the Sickle). The latter poem ends with the famous couplet:

First we must reap power
And after that the Aryan crop.

Here there is no mincing of words, no resort to finery, no sound or word for its own sake.

A provocative anti-romantic stance may be found in the early pieces of N.V. Krishna Warrior (1916-89). “Madirasiyile Oru Sayahnam” (An Evening in Madras) pokes fun at the infatuation a college student feels for his Anglo-Indian classmate, whom he idealizes, only to meet with a pitiable discomfiture at the end. His “Rats” written against the background of the famine during World War II, is marked by bitter irony and satire in favour of the rats at the expense of the humans. With the same vitriolic pen he wrote the poem “Mohan Das Gandhi and Nathuram Godse,” “Kalla Deivangal” (False Gods) and “Avasanathe Aspatri” (The Last Hospital). M. Govindan (1919-89), an intellectual of no mean order, exposed through his poetry as through his prose essays the hypocrisy and corruption endemic in the contemporary Indian social milieu. His “Gazette Notification,” “Lucifer’s Solicitor,” and “Pashanappattu” (Poison Song) reveal the intensity of his repulsion for the evil forces in society. His biographical poem on Kunchan Nambiar, the 18th century master humorist in Malayalam, is a touching account of the last days of that great poet. These poets may be said to have pursued the Edasseri line, as opposed to the Edappalli line. To this may be said to belong writers like Kadavanat Kuttikrishnan, Olappamanna Subrahmanyam Nambudiripad and Akkitham Achyuthan Nambudiri. Akkitham (b. 1926) sprang a surprise on the readers with his long poem *Irupathamnoottandinte Ithihasam* (The Epic of the 20th Century), which is a moving rejection of all the crippling ideologies in the minds of the young in the 1950s. He castigates those who maintain that the stomach is the central concern of man and plead that “light brings grief, darkness is happiness.” In his later writings like *Balidarshanam* and “Karathalamalakam” (lit. Gooseberry in the Hand) and

Sparshamanikal he reveals his sterling qualities as a poet in the great Indian tradition. His “Nityamegham” (The Everlasting Cloud) is a poem that subtly invokes the spirit of Kalidasa’s *Cloud Messenger*: it opens with an image of the rain-cloud:

With the fire and steam of the pain
Of separation from the Beloved,
With a sigh, with a tear,
The spirit of time makes a rain-cloud,
And flies it in play
Through the sky of fancy
As a child flies a kite.

R. Ramachandran (1923-2005) had neo-romantic leanings to begin with, however he soon discovered his own style, which was not like that of anyone else. He wrote little but that little was worth a lot. G. Kumara Pillai (1923-2000) started off in the Changampuzha school, but as he grew up tried other styles. There are quite a few beautiful lyrics to his credit, such as “Arorumorathe...,” “Ee nalla nattilallo...,” “Dharmadam Dharmasankatam,” etc. Chemmanam Chacko (b. 1926) is obsessed with the decline of values in our society and he exposes to ridicule our vanities and pretensions in a number of anthologies. In “Rice,” the speaker returns from North India, fed up with chappathi, only to find that rice is scarce in his own native village in Kerala. Kunjunni (b. 1927), who happens to be the best-known poet of children’s verse in modern times, is also quick to notice the ironies in contemporary life:

After all, men rush forward
With legs that bend only backward!

But these discrepancies and resulting tensions in life go beyond simple humour and assume massive proportions of tragic irony in the poems of N.N. Kakkad (1927-87).

He uses all the resources of puranic metaphors to conjure up images of horror stalking the corridors of life, as in “Invocation”:

O Brobdingnagian monster
jamming ‘my ‘flesh ‘into
a bowl of blood and sweat,
you, my lord, come!
Here is a worm
that invokes you
from the swarming gutter.

Suddenly, as it were, the pseudo-romantic illusions of fellow poets topple down and Kakkad evokes the epiphany of a face to face encounter with the reality of this world, couched in the language of the great myths of mankind. From the poems in his early collection *1963* to his last volume *Saphalameeyatra* (Journey Successful), he consistently worked out a scheme for modernist poetry in Malayalam. His early poems were a puzzle to many readers but by the time of his last poems, readers had grown attuned to his style and diction and vision. Swerving away from the trodden path of neo-romanticism was the poetry of Ayyappa Paniker (b.1930), whose “Kurukshetram” too upset many a gentle reader in the beginning. He went on to write a series of cartoon poems along with “Kudumbapuranam” (The Family Saga), “Pakalukal, Ratrikal” (Days, Nights) and “Gopikandakam” and produced a long poem of an epic journey called *Gotrayanam* (The Journey of the Tribe). The modernist trend was fostered by poets like Attoor Ravi Varma (b. 1930), whose “Cancer” and “Sankramanam” questioned and broadened the sensibilities of the Malayali reading public. M.N. Paloor (b. 1932) too exposes the absurdities of modern urban life in “Poet at the Airport,” but always in his mind looms large the tragicomic vision of Vyasa’s Mahabharata. Cherian K. Cherian (b. 1932) is the author of well-known poems like “Palazhimathanam (The Churning of the Ocean of Milk) and “Bhasmasuran,”. Madhavan Ayyappath (b. 1934) with his poems in *Kilimozhikal* introduced a new sensibility and vocabulary centring around the image of the bird, which was at variance with the fashion of the time. Yusafali Kecheri (b. 1934) is the author of many collections such as *Aayiram*

Navulla Mounam (Silence with a Thousand Tongues) and *Kecheripuzha* (*Kecheri River*). He is also a well-known film lyricist. Sugathakumari (b.1934) uses a style that is reminiscent of the romantics, but realizes the contradictions between dream and reality. Her early poems are of a personal nature, introspective and self-centred, but later on she broadens her themes and concerns to include social inequalities, man's inhumanity to man, ecological imbalance and the problems of women, children and the tribal people. "Ratrimazha" (Rain at Night) and "Colossus" are good examples of these enlarged preoccupations. The latter poem closes with these lines:

Whom do I call through this lute?
Whom do I search for?

I search for a mighty one
Mighty as the Varaha
That rescued our Mother
From the depths of the sea.

The poetry of the sixties and seventies was marked by a renewed commitment to everyday life: it was felt that contemporary poetry had to be contemporary with our life. The echo of life's rhythms may be heard in the poems of Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan (b.1935), such as "Kattalan" (The Woodsman), "Kiratavritham" (The Hunter's Tale), "Santha" and "Mazha Peyyunnu, Maddalam Kottunnu" (It Rains and the Drums Beat). He may be said to have resuscitated the folk tradition behind the loud recitation of poetry before large crowds. He avoids the hackneyed vocabulary and stale imagery of the neo-romantics, and brings a fresh vigour into poetry. Kilimanoor Remakantan (b. 1935) has a more subdued tone and quieter rhythm in his narratives and lyrics. His translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is a remarkable achievement. Neelamperoor Madhusudanan Nair (b. 1936) is a progressivist, as may be seen from his poems in *Urangum Munpu* (Before Going to Sleep). Pazhavila Ramesan (b. 1936) is not to be classed with any school, for his poetry pursues an independent channel of its own. K.V. Tampi (b. 1937) is the author of several works like

Punarjanmam (Rebirth). Vishnu Narayanan Nambudiri (b. 1939) handles a variety of themes ranging from the age-old glory of Indian tradition (as in “Pitryaanam”) to the consternation of the modern Indian who wonders what has happened to his self-identity, as in his “Where is my Face?” This loss of face is a malady that he explores in a number of poems. Karoor Sasi (1939) has made his mark as a poet aware of developments in contemporary society. Sreekumaran Tampi (b. 1940), well-known as a writer of film songs, is also the author of poetry collections like *Engineerude Veena* (Engineer’s Lute).

D. Vinayachandran Pillai (b. 1946) seems to look at poetry as a multifaceted celebration of life; he captures the rhythms of the carnival as he recites his poems aloud. His “Vinayachandrika,” “Veettilekkulla Vazhi” (The Homeward Path), “Samastha-Keralam P.O”. (All Kerala P.O.) and “Samayamanasam” (The Mind of Time) display an originality that is rare in these days of urbanized life. The breath of the open air gives them a special charm. Ezhachery Ramachandran (b. 1944) too invokes the folk tradition and espouses the tragic sufferings of poor people, as in his *Neeli* and *Kavadichintu*. The spirit of the seventies is most powerfully evoked in the writings of K. Sachidanandan (b. 1946), his ever-changing styles reveal a mind that is continually groping and growing. From *Atmagita* (*Song of the Self*) of 1974 onwards he has evolved into a mature poet of manifold themes and styles. Being a literary critic as well, he writes with an inner understanding of the potentialities of the varied styles and forms he experiments with. Lalita Lenin (b. 1946) is a poet of balanced outlook on life and literature, as is seen in her collection of poems, *Karkitakavavu* (The New Moon of July-August). K.G. Sankara Pillai (b.1948) is another product of the seventies, seeing life in the raw, but portraying it with imagination and intelligence. His early poems like “Bengal,” later poems like “Kochiyile Vrikshangal (Trees of Kochi) and the more recent works embody a poetic vision which keeps his readers expecting something to turn up. This anxiety of expectation gives his poems a futuristic dimension. Nellickal Muralidharan (b. 1948), who is also a scholar and a critic, has several lyrics and narrative pieces to his credit, with a strong inclination to the folk tradition. S. Ramesan Nair (b. 1948) is the author of several volumes like *Suryahridayam* (The Heart of

the Sun); He is also a film lyricist. Kunhappa Pattanur (b. 1947) captures the spirit of Northern Kerala in several of his poems of social commitment. Desamangalam Ramakrishnan (b. 1948), in his *Tataramayanam*, *Vittupoya Vakkukal*, *Vicharichatalla* and other collections, reveals an acute awareness of the subtleties of linguistic expression, coupled with the essence of folk culture. A. Ayyappan (b. 1949) is a breaker of conventions both as a man and as a poet. His poems, as in collections like *Balikkurippukal* (Sacrificial Notes), have a secret fire in them.

S. Madhusudanan Pillai (Kilimanoor Madhu, b. 1952) belongs to the modernist phase, with an occasional touch of the unfamiliar and the out of the way. Sasi Cheravalli (b. 1952), Rose Mary (b. 1956) and Umesh Babu (b. 1958) have made their own contribution to the growth of Malayalam poetic sensibility. Balachandran Chullikad (b. 1957) stormed into the scene with his vibrant voice and intensely emotional outbursts in poems like “Amavasi” (The New Moon) and “Manasantaram.” (Change of Mind). “Evide John? (Where is John?) evokes strong memories of John Abraham, the film maker, who passed away long before his time.

The oral recitative tradition, often represented by the term *kavi arangu* (poetry on the stage) is carried on by a brilliant array of poets who hold the audience spell-bound by the quality of their voice as well as by the melody and rhythm of their rendering. V. Madhusudanan Nair (b. 1950) is the author of *Naranathu Bhrantan* (The Mad One of Naranath) and *Gandharvam*. The title poem in the former volume concerns one of the twelve children of a pariah girl, who is supposed to be the grand ancestress of all the ‘people’ of Kerala.

O ‘Mother’, who has borne twelve children,
I am the mad one among them.

Invoking folk tradition and local mythology, Madhusudanan Nair narrates a captivating tale that appeals to all Malayalis. Kureepuzha Sreekumar (b.1955) also has a mastery of the folk style and his poems

appeal best when they are read aloud, since part of the meaning comes from the rhythm. “Jessy, Ninakkenthu Thonni?” (What did you feel, Jessy?) and “Keezhalan” (The Downtrodden) are moving presentations ‘of human’ suffering.

There are a large number of poetic voices, now in their thirties and forties, and some in their early fifties too, who are capable of establishing a new movement with the spirit of the changing times in their new rhythms and visions. Methil Radhakrishnan is a pioneer avante garde writer. T.P. Rajeevan is equally enterprising. Civic Chandran (b. 1951), S. Ramesan (b. 1952), K.V. Baby (b. 1953, author of *The Bird Brooding over the Eggs*), V.G. Tampi (b. 1955), Savitri Rajeevan (b.1956, author of *Cherivu*) Raghavan Atholi (b. 1957), Prabha Varma (b. 1959, author of *Chandananzhi*), Vijayalakshmi (b. 1960, author of *Mrigasikshakan*), P.P. Ramachandran (b. 1962), K.R. Toni (b. 1964), Indrababu (b. 1965), Jayan, K.C. (b. 1966), Rafiq Ahamed (b.1967), Manoj Kuroor, Sreehari, Santhan, Raman, Anwar Ali, Anita Tampi, Sandhya, Rajan Kylas, Santhosh Kumar, S. Joseph, Shiraz Ali, Rupesh Paul, Sebastian, Pavithran Theekkuni and a large number of young poets have emerged during the past fifteen years, virtually constituting a new movement or new school. All of them are promising, only time can tell who among them will fulfill the promise. It is no doubt heartening to find that so many young writers are most active at the dawn of the new century, full of new visions and fresh energy and resist the attractions of sentimental cinematic verse. But the list of the movement must remain incomplete.

Drama

As in poetry, in Malayalam drama too, a change was in the air even before independence. N. Krishna Pillai had written his *Bhagnabhavanam*, *Kanyaka* and *Balabalam*; his influence on later playwrights came to bear fruit in the early years of independence. K. Surendran, early C.N. Sreekantan Nair (1928-76), early G. Sankara Pillai bear marks of this influence. Pulimana Parameswaran Pillai (1916-49) wrote *Samatvavadi*, which had an experimental orientation: this trend also bore

fruition in the years after independence, as in the works of N.N. Pillai (1918-96), K.T. Mohamed (b. 1928), P.M.A. Aziz (b. 1936) and a host of others. The communist theatre, such as KPAC, Desabhimani, etc., and the commercial theatre (like those of N.N. Pillai, P.J. Antony, Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair etc.) vied with each other to win over the audience, (at times these two appeared to merge together), while amateur theatre, like Shri Chithira Tirunal Vayanasala or Kalavedi or school groups, catered to the tastes of a limited number of enthusiasts. Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai, Kainikkara Kumara Pillai, N.P. Chellappan Nair, T.N. Gopinathan Nair, Nagavally R.S. Kurup etc. continued to write in the older tradition, either historical or puranic plays or comedies exposing the follies and foibles of contemporary urban middle class. They may be said to have drawn inspiration from C.V. Raman Pillai or E.V. Krishna Pillai.

In Northern Kerala the Kendrakalasamiti was responsible for awakening an enlightened interest in drama and theatre. Like Thoppil Bhasi in the south, a number of playwrights in the north, like Cherukad (Govindappisharodi, 1914-76), Thikkodiyan (P. Kunhananthan Nair, 1916-2001), P.C. Kuttikrishnan, Edasseri Govindan Nair and others produced socially relevant plays. Later K.T. Mohamed (b. 1929), author of *Karavatta Pasu* (The Cow Gone Dry), *Ithu Bhoomiyaanu* (This is the Earth) and several other well-known plays, became the centre of theatre activities in Malabar. C.J. Thomas (1918-60), who was convinced that the life of the drama lay in its stage presentation and not in the written text, wrote three remarkable plays, *Avan Veendum Varunnu!* (Behold, He Comes Again), *1128-il Kraim 27* (Crime 27 of 1128) and *Aa Manushyan Nee Thanne* (Thou art That Man), but he could not see any of his plays performed to his satisfaction during his lifetime. There is no denying that there was a lot of genuine enthusiasm for theatre and the literature of theatre. The fifty years after independence was thus a very productive period, at least in terms of quantity. More plays were written and published during this time than during any earlier period. Theatre audience also grew in size throughout the length and breadth of Kerala. But there was a great divergence between theatre and drama all through the half-century. Good plays remained un-staged, while popular theatre pieces did not possess substantial literary qualities.

This dilemma faced all good playwrights; some of them were satisfied with their written work. But Kavalam Narayana Panikker (b. 1928) and G. Sankara Pillai (1930-89) tried to find a solution for this anomaly in their own respective ways. Kavalam concentrated on poetic drama and drew inspiration from folk theatre and Indian tradition, not a mechanical adaptation of the peripheral features, but a creative adaptation of ancient techniques with a new meaning and new force. Sankara Pillai resorted to the use of imagination to supply whatever was deficient in experimental drama, avoiding the monotony of stereotyped dialogue and illusions of realism. Both Kavalam and Sankara Pillai were trying to explore the native theatre. The discussions that took place in the Natakakalaris at various centres, with the active participation of Sreekantan Nair, M. Govindan, M.V. Devan, M.K. Sanoo, Thomas Mathew, Ayyappa Paniker, P.K. Venukuttan Nair, Kavalam Narayana Panikker and G. Sankara Pillai, along with the actual productions at these kalaris seemed to indicate a way of rediscovering our native theatre. This is borne out by the later experimental works of Kavalam and Sankara Pillai. Perhaps the establishment of the School of Drama at Thrissur under the University of Calicut could be seen as a byproduct of all these efforts. The later plays of C.N Sreekantan Nair (*Kanchanasita*, *Saketam*, and *Lankalakshmi*), the later plays of G. Sankara Pillai (*Karutha Deivathe Thedi*) and the mature plays of Kavalam (*Deivathaar*, *Avanavankatampa*, *Theyyatheyyam*, etc.) are brilliant examples of Malayalam drama in its maturity, along with the three plays of C.J. Thomas mentioned above.

To this we may add *Souparnika*, *Velliyazhcha* and *Padippura* by Narendra Prasad (1946-2003). Prasad was also a sensitive director of plays, in addition to being a good film actor. He had a tragic understanding of life, which also took in its stride the lighter moments in it. *Elamkulathe Amma* by P.K. Venukuttan Nair, and several experimental works of K.T. Mohamed, Aziz and others could be mentioned here. Omcheri (N.N. Pillai, b.1924) has several plays to his credit, notably *Thevarude Aana* (God's Elephant) and *Ulakude Perumal* (The Lord of the World). Vayala Vasudevan Pillai (b.1945), the erstwhile Director of the Calicut University

School of Drama, is the author of *Viswadarshanam* (The Cosmic Vision), *Thulasivanam* and *Agni*. Among the other playwrights of this half century, mention may be made of G. Gopalakrishnan, author of *Semitheri* (Cemetery), Sreerangam Vikraman Nair, author of *Chithalpputtukal* (Anthills), C.P. Rajasekharan (b. 1949, author of plays like *Pratimakal Vilkanuntu* (Statues for Sale), P. Balachandran, author of *Pavam Usman*, T.M. Abraham, who wrote *Nizhalkootaram* (Shadow Tent), Srijanardanan, author of *Viralppadukal*, Madhu Master, author of *Caligula*, K.S. Sreenath, author of *Devashilakal*, etc. These are many young artisans to theater, but not as many as crowd in the field of poetry and fiction.

Fiction: The Novel

The post-independence period saw a fresh start in the history of longer fiction in Malayalam as in many other Indian languages, parallel to the evolution of post-world war fiction in other parts of the world. It was both a break and a continuation. Kesava Dev, who was a Communist in the thirties and forties turned away from diehard ideologies and wrote a symbolic novel called *Arku Vendi?* (For Whose Sake?) in 1950, challenging the philosophy of Stalinist liquidation of political enemies. It had a special significance in the context of the Calcutta thesis. After portraying the class struggle of farm labourers in *Rantidangazhi* (Two Measures) in 1949, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai turned away from party politics and produced a moving romance in *Chemmeen* (*Shrimps*) in 1956. For S.K. Pottekkatt and Vaikom Muhamed Basheer, who had not dabbled in politics, the continuity is marked in the former's *Vishakanyaka* (Poison Maid, 1948) and the latter's *Ntuppuppakkoranendarnnu* (My Grandpa had an Elephant, 1951).

The non-political social or domestic novel was championed by P.C. Kuttikrishnan (Uroob) with his *Ummachu* (1955) and *Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum* (Men and Women of Charm, 1958). In 1957 Basheer's *Pathummayude Aadu* (Pathumma's Goat) brought in a new kind of prose tale, which perhaps only Basheer could handle with dexterity. Vettoor Raman Nair (1919-2003) was a widely known writer who in his short stories

portrayed either the life of the rural middle class or the life of army men in the barracks, but he also wrote the mini-novel *Jeevikkan Marannupoya Stree* (The Woman Who Forgot to Live), without any ostensible political affiliation. The fifties thus mark the evolution of a new kind of fiction, which had its impact on the short stories as well. This was the auspicious moment for the entry of T. Padmanabhan and M.T. Vasudevan Nair upon the scene. It was recognized that politics often reduced the larger concerns of life to mere ideological issues, while the life of the individuals constituting the entire population has many other interests and perspectives. Any reductive over-simplification of life results in the emaciation of literature.

The trend away from social realism interpreted in a narrow sense led to the growth of the Malayalam novel in the post-independence era. With the phenomenal success of *Chemmeen* as a novel and as a film made Thakazhi turn to write on a larger canvas the inclusive accounts of the people around him. The mature works of Pottekkatt, Basheer, Dev, Thakazhi and Uroob make the third quarter of the 20th century one of the brightest periods of the novel in Malayalam. Pottekkatt's *Oru Theruvinte Katha* (The Tale of a Street) and *Oru Desathinte Katha* (The Tale of a Locale) gave the author ample canvas to narrate the stories of a number of individuals and groups. The day-to-day lives of this common humanity is the stuff of great fiction and Pottekkatt got the Jnanpith Puraskar for his magnum opus *Oru Desathinte Katha*. Thakazhi took up the portrayal of generations of families in *Ouseppinte Makkal* (Children of Ouseph) and extended it further to write a *brihad akhyayika* or grand narrative covering the lives of hundreds of characters and dozens of families and several generations. He was writing an entire era and entire region in his magnum opus *Kayar* (Coir), which procured him the Jnanpith Puraskar.

Pottekkatt was perhaps the first to experiment with the writing of an entire region; Thakazhi added the historical dimension by bringing in centuries and generations. In *Kayar* the life of a whole community in the village complex of Kuttanad covering two centuries and a half, beginning with the land settlement and ending with the land legislation under the

first Communist government in Kerala, is narrated. The central concern of the novel is the relation between man and the earth he cultivates. Already Uroob had developed the concept of an extensive canvas in *Sundarikalum Sundaranmarum*. The grand narrative found its rightful place in Malayalam fiction during the period after independence. Kesava Dev, in *Ayalkar* (Neighbours), used the large-framed novel to recount the intricate relationships between different castes and communities. The Nairs, Ezhavas and Christians figure dominantly in the complex and involved story of the people who live in any Kerala village as neighbours. These novelists were holding a mirror up to life in all its diversities, without identifying individual heroes and heroines or villains. M.K. Menon (Vilasini, 1928-93) attempted the biggest novel in Malayalam, perhaps also in any Indian language, in *Avakasikal* (Inheritors), probably motivated by the desire to write the grand narrative centring around a family. His other novels like *Inangatha Kannikal* (Unfit Chains) and *Chundeli* (Mouse) were also experimental. Puthoor Unnikrishnan (b. 1933) reveals his control over fictional material with remarkable narrative skill in *Balikkallu* and *Aanappaka*. K.L. Mohana Varma (b. 1936), author of novels like *Chambal*, *Ohari* (Share) and *Cricket*, extended the thematic range of fiction, bringing in urban concerns.

Another tendency that could be found during this period is the attempt to retell puranic episodes. P.K. Balakrishnan set the trend with his popular redaction of the Mahabharata from the point of view of Droupadi: she is reflecting on the circuitous course of her life during the last night of the battle of Kurukshetra (Eni Njan Urangatte). M.T. Vasudevan Nair's *Rantamoozham* (The Second Turn) recounts the story of Bhimasena, supposed to be the son of Vayu; this is demystified or demythified in the novel. Other writers have also tried to retell other classics in the form of the novel, since the novel has become the most popular form of the narrative in Malayalam. Some of the novels of Kovilan (V.V Ayyappan, b. 1923) are region-based like his masterpiece *Thattakam*, but some others are located away from Kerala, in the Himalayas, as in his military tales. His works have a remarkable philosophical insight and are written in an answerable style, unique to himself.

K.E. Mathai (Parappurath, 1924-81), who also served in the army, is well known for his popular novels such as *Panitheeratha Veedu* (Unfinished House) *Aranazhika Neram* (Half an Hour). His friend K. Surendran (1922-97) authored several popular novels like *Thaalam* (Rhythm), *Maya* and *Kattukurangu* (Wild Monkey).

The post-independence novel has been enriched by the contribution of writers living outside Kerala. The pravasi novel has added a fresh chapter, bringing in new landscapes and new characters. The *nagara tinai* (city landscape) has provided the milieu for some of the best novels in Malayalam. Kakkanadan, O.V. Vijayan, M. Mukundan, P. Sachidanandan (Anand) and others have annexed these new areas to the concern of the Malayali fiction-readers. Not that all of them have located the action in all their writings outside Kerala, but they have brought a new perspective or sensibility, as the pravasi poets have done of late. Kakkanadan (George Varghese, b.1935), once attached to leftist ideology, turned away from it to write one of the most powerful narratives based on that experience in his novel *Ushnamekhala* (The Tropics). O.V. Vijayan (1931-2004), having spent a number of years in Delhi, locates his classic novel *Khazakinte Itihasam* (The Legend of Khazak) in the remote village in his native Palakkad. It has a simple plot but the inlaid narration invests it with a metaphysical or even mystical aura, which marks it out among the works of fiction attempted by Malayalis during the post-freedom period. It may be said that in novelettes like *Khazak* and *Gurusagaram*, he was turning away from the grand narrative in the realistic mode in favour of metaphorical or allegorical fiction, which was the forte of narratives in ancient India. To suggest a symbolically large design with a short physical frame, in other words to use a microscope as a magnifying glass, is the kind of technique that Vijayan resorted to. It was perhaps better suited to his world vision.

Anand also seems to take a cue from Vijayan, but moves away from it so as to make fiction read less like fiction and more like pseudo-history, without abandoning the allegorical element. His *Jaivamanushyan* and later works follow this pattern, although his first novel *Alkkoottam* (The Crowd) had all the ingredients of normative fiction. Several younger

novelists, like perhaps N.S. Madhavan (b. 1948), are apparently eager to follow this style of distorting reality for the sake of getting at truth. With their works one may say that Malayalam novel is entering the world of post-modernism. After a stint at the existentialist novel à la Sartre and Camus, Mukundan is a front runner in the post-modern trend with such works as *Deivathinte Vikruthikal* (God's Mischief) and *Kesavante Vilapangal* (The lamentations of Kesavan). But to most readers *Mayyazhippuzhayude Theerangalil* (On the Banks of Mayyazhi) is likely to remain his early masterpiece. He had also written a critique of modernism much earlier, called *Enthanu Aadhunikata?* (What is Modernism?). But he has apparently moved on from that position. N.P. Mohamed (1928-2003) too tried his hand at political allegory in *Hiranyakasipu* high-lighting the horrors of totalitarianism, but moved on to the social novel as in *Ennappaadam* (Oilfield) and *Maram* (Tree), which are very sensitive portrayals of the life of the Muslim community, different in style from that of Vaikom Mohamed Basheer.

The novel is perhaps the best-seller in the consumerist book market today, and hence there are a large number of writers catering to that trend. Muttathu Varkey (1918-89) has a number of popular novels to his credit, such as *Inapravukal* (A Pair of Doves), and *Padatha Painkili* (The Bird that Doesn't Sing). These works set a trend in story-telling, involving simple domestic characters in their everyday life with their joys and sorrows told in a rather sentimental melodramatic language. No wonder it attracted a vast number of readers and considerably helped to promote the popularity of the novel form. Today it commands the largest readership of all literary forms. It is even said that it contributed to the growth of literacy. They probably dominate the field of serial fiction in the pulp weeklies and magazines and are Kanam, E.J. (E.J. Philip, 1926-87), Pulinkunnu Antony, Kottayam Pushpanath, P.V. Thampi, Mallika Yunis, M.D. Ratnamma, etc. etc. It is not easy to list the novelists in this category; their name is a legion.

Among the more serious and gifted of these novelists are Sarah Thomas (b. 1934) author of *Narmadipudava*, P.R. Syamala (1931-90), author of *Shyamaranyam among other works*, K.B. Sreedevi (b. 1940,

author of *Yajnam*), P. Vatsala (b. 1938, author of *Nellu, Agneyam*), S.K. Marar (b. 1930, author of *Sharapolimala*), G.N. Panikker (b.1937, author of *Iruttinte Thazhvara*) and George Onakkoor (b. 1941, author of well known novels like *Illam* and *Ulkkadal* (The Bay). Perumbadavam Sreedharan (b. 1938) has several novels to his credit, the best known among them being *Oru Sankirtanam Pole* (Verily like a Psalm), based on the life of Dostoevsky. Among those who have explored the regional novel with an intense flavour of the local language and local social fabric may be mentioned G. Vivekanandan (1923-99, author of *Kallichellamma*) and U.A. Khader (b.1935, author of *Thrikkottoor Peruma*).

Several writers are there who portray the decline of the feudal system and of the old order of the joint family, among whom easily the most gifted is M.T. Vasudevan Nair (b.1933), author of a large number of popular favourites like *Nalukettu* (Four-chambered House), *Asuravithu*, etc. The landscape and ethos of the Valluvanad region and the transformations undergone by them in the course of the century, involving relics of the tarawad and the communal tensions provide a challenging theme for the highly evocative style of Vasudevan Nair's narrative art. The novels of V.K.N. (Narayanankutty Nair, 1932-2004) belong to the small sub-genre of satirical fiction, not largely explored after C.V. Raman Pillai's *Premamritam*. His *Pitamahan* and *General Chathans* take us to the rarefied world of spoofs, giving us occasions for guffaws of laughter.

Malayattoor Ramakrishnan (1927-97) wrote *Verukal* (Roots), depicting the story of his family or community, but he also fictionalized his experience as a senior civil servant in *Yantram* (The Machine). Something of the latter kind we find in *Chuvappunada* (The Red Tape) by E. Vasu (b. 1939), exposing and denouncing the stranglehold of officialdom in the life of the average citizen. C. Radhakrishnan (b. 1939) is a prolific writer of both novels and short stories, with a wide variety of themes and experimental in the narrative mode. Narain (b. 1939), perhaps a late entrant in the field, came up with his own account of tribal life, otherwise not adequately presented in Malayalam fiction. His short stories as well as his novelettes like *Kocharethi* have their own special narrative mode and flavour. Punathil

Kunhabdulla (b. 1940) is rightly famous as the author of popular novels like *Smarakasilakal* (Memorial Stones) and *Marunnu* (Medicine). Madampu Kunjikkuttan (b.1941) has authored a few very powerful novels, including *Ashwathamavu* and *Bhrashtu*.

Among the younger generation of novelists born after independence, there are many who have proved their mettle and may yet spring surprises in the years to come. N.S. Madhavan (b. 1948), in his short stories as well as his novels, chooses unfamiliar themes or unfamiliar treatment, as may be seen in *Choolaimettile Savangal* (The Corpses of Chulaimedu) and *Higuita*. U.K. Kumaran (b. 1950) is indefatigable in his search for new themes and plots. C.V. Balakrishnan (b. 1952) is the author of *Ayussinte Pustakam* and T.V. Kochubawa (1955-99) that of *Vridhdhasadanam* (Old Age Home), both eager to explore new areas of experience. Akbar Kakkattil (b. 1954) keeps widening his canvas from time to time. Shihabudin Poythumkadavu (b. 1963) is a rising novelist and short story writer. Young novelists today are deeply interested in experimentation both in theme and technique, taking long strides in the post modern direction.

Fiction: The Short Story

Of all the forms of literary expression in modern Malayalam the short story had the fastest and steadiest growth. Already at the time of independence, there were a number of stalwarts who continued to write equally well in the half century that followed. As in the case of other forms like poetry and the novel, there was a kind of inevitable overlap, since developments in the cultural field do not strictly follow the contours of political events. Karoor, Basheer, Dev, Thakazhi, Varkey, Pottekkatt and Kuttikrishnan were doing excellent work although some of them had vegetated from shorter to longer fiction, prompted by the confidence gained from the experience of the short story. The limited canvas gave scope for greater variety and concentration. Dalit life was also portrayed in short fiction as in the writings of T.K.C. Vaduthala (T.K. Chathan, 1921-88). He has his followers in a number of writers now like Paul Chirackarode. The new writers had new experiences to narrate and new ways of doing it.

Corresponding to the Changampuzha style in poetry, there was a tender, romantically inclined, narrative seeping into shorter fiction in the fifties. Unsuccessful love, which captures the imagination in early youth, dominated the thematic concerns of the younger generation. T. Padmanabhan (b. 1931), who swore allegiance only to the short story, and has jealously maintained it all through his life without casting even a surreptitious glance at longer fiction, was in the vanguard of the new short story. In a series of brilliant collections like *Prakasam Parathunna Penkutty* (The Girl Spreading Light Around), *Makhansinghinte Maranam* (The Death of Makhan Singh), *Sakshi* (Witness) and *Kaalabhairavan*, he has explored both the form of the short story and the psychology of the people involved in each story. What appeals most to his readers in all his early and recent stories is the lyrical quality of the language and the aesthetics of his perceptions, especially in the portrayal of loneliness and helplessness. M.T. Vasudevan Nair too is a master of the art of short fiction with an unerring eye for detail: stories like “Kuttiedathi” are classics in the genre. The same is true of “Pathanam” (The Fall) and “Abhayam” (Refuge). His protagonists pass through different stages of evolution. Maybe, because the space in a short story is very limited, he later on opted for the larger canvas of extended fiction. His study of Hemingway gives a clue to his own art of fiction.

T. Padmanabhan and M.T. Vasudevan Nair serve as bridges between the early modern short story writers in Malayalam, of the so-called renaissance, and the new short story of the late fifties and sixties. Through introspection, loneliness, angst, the need for self-definition, they, like their protagonists, lead the reader towards the inner world of individuals, often living outside the conventions of social life. The rebels and the outcasts, the insulted and the injured, receive a sympathetic treatment.. The modernists who come in the wake of these master story tellers include O.V. Vijayan, Kakkanadan, Madhavikutty (Kamala Das/Kamala Soraiya b. 1932), M.P. Narayana Pillai (1939-98) M. Mukundan, Vaishakhan (M.K. Gopinathan Nair, b. 1940), M. Sukumaran (b. 1943), Zachariah (b. 1945), S.V. Venugopan Nair (b. 1945) P. Padmarajan (1945-90), Sarah Joseph (b. 1946), V.P. Sivakumar (1947-93): a brilliant galaxy of writers who looked at life with a fresh mind and recorded their creative responses in a highly sensitive idiom.

With their writings Malayalam fiction comes to be on a par with world fiction, truly contemporary in spirit and form. Vijayan's "Parakal (Rocks), "Kadaltheerathu" (On the Seashore), "Ettukali" (The Spider), "Chengannur Vandi" (The Chengannur Train) and "Arimpara" are classics of their kind. They are moulded by the post-war, post-independence sensibility, just as the sensibility of the times was moulded by these very writings and have a profundity lacking in most of the writings of the progressive realists before independence. It is almost a new grammar, as it were, that like his contemporaries Vijayan uses.

In the hands of the naturalistic writers, creative imagination had suffered a great deal and lost its freedom and freshness. Kakkanadan in his stories like "Nishadasankirtanam" and "Shrichakram" employs language to reach out to the ineffable and beyond. Language is employed to serve a function it does not normally serve in conventional writing. Here it is not the given language, but the one created by the author. N. Mohanan (1933-99) was a writer of very delicate touches, as may be seen in his *Ente Katha (Ninteyum)* (My Story as well as Yours). C.V. Sreeraman (b.1933) has written several beautiful short stories, exquisitely chiseled, such as "Irickappindam" and "Vastuhara." Madhavikutty in her early short stories explores her own uncommon experiences; the effort is not to tell a pleasing story or entertain the reader, but understand oneself. It is not the language of communication in the vulgar sense, but that of confession or communion. "Pakshiyude Manam" (The Scent of the Bird) and "Kalyani" are good examples of the new sensibility. M.P. Narayana Pillai (1939-98) was a resourceful writer with an original mind, and his stories in the collection *Murugan Enna Pampatty* (Murugan, the Snake-charmer) reveals a sense of the weird coupled with a sense of refined humour. Mukundan, perhaps more than in his novels, deals with the unknown aspects of everyday life, as in "Radha, Radha Alone" and in his story of the footballer. Partly because of his familiarity with French existentialists, he is self-conscious in his modernist writing. He seems to choose his themes and subjects to suit his own preconceived idea. This gives a philosophical edge to some of his stories. Zachariah starts off with a native intuition about the nature of human experience; he is not unduly worried about the possible implications of the

images he creates. In his early stories he just creates an image or a series of scattered images, which the readers might use to make out their own meanings. S.V. Venugopan Nair looks at the situations in life with a sense of humour and exposes life's little follies and ironies, as in *Rekhayilillatha Oral* (One Who is not in the Records).

Padmarajan seems to examine his experience of the world under a microscope and speculates on the potential significance of what he is able to see. He is sometimes lured by unfamiliar events or scenes, and, as in his novels, idealizes the situations so as to make a powerful impact on the reader. His films also centre around the out of the way or abnormal aspects of life. Sarah Joseph in the collection *Papathara* (The Place of Sin) questions the assumptions prevalent in society with an acutely sensitive mind. "Prakasiniyude Makkal" (Children of Prakasini) and "Muditheyyam" reveal her obsession with near-surrealistic images. Her novels, like *Alahayude Makkal* also are preoccupied with the un-hackneyed aspects of life and her perceptions are rendered exact by her mastery of her dialect. V.P. Sivakumar, perhaps the youngest of the modernists born in the very year of independence, is also among the first of the postmodernists, and his experience of translating some of the postmodern short story writers in world literature, like his favourite Borhes, may have given him the push to move further into the future. The virtual reality he himself creates is the substance of his writings. In a sense that spirit is still guiding some of the more recent short fiction writers in Malayalam. The transition to the postmodern is already charted out in the latest stories of Sivakumar like "Pratishta" (Installation).

M. Sukumaran's stories like "Thookkumarangal Njannalkku," (The Gallows are for Us) are marked by unusual intensity of vision. Payipra Radhakrishnan (Radhakrishnan Kartha, (b. 1952), author of *Swarnamedal* and his wife Nalini Bekal (b. 1955), who wrote *Hamsaganam* and *Muchilottamma* also deserve mention here. The new trend has found enthusiastic followers, who have tried to de-familiarize the real and to realize the unfamiliar. Victor Leenus (1946-92) also may be said to belong to this

category, like T.P. Kishore (1957-98). Manasi (P.A. Rugmini, b. 1948), author of *Idivalinte Thengal* (The Sobs of the Sword of Thunder), Ashita (b. 1956), who has authored *Apoornaviramangal* (Incomplete Stops), Gita Hiranyan (b. 1956-2002, author of *Ottasnappil Othukkanavilla Janmasatyam* (The Truth of a Lifetime Cannot be Compressed in a Single Snap), Chandramati (Chandrika, b. 1954), author of *Aryavartanam*, *Devigramam* and *Reindeer*, depicting life's impressions with the clarity and sharpness of a cut diamond, N. Prabhakaran, Harikumar, Fantasy and fabulations fresh enter into their fiction etc. The tradition extends further to include the youngest generation of writers who are very creative, like A.S. Priya, Indu Menon, B. Murali, R. Unny, Santhosh Echikanam, K.R. Meera, and others in an apparently unending line. As in the case of poetry, the beginning of the new country is marked by the active involvement of ever so many young writers which should be a source of encouragement to the senior writers too.

Literary Criticism

The growth of higher institutions of learning, the achievement of total literacy for the state, the spread of the library movement and the popularity of literary periodicals were all factors leading to a boom of critical enterprises among the writers. At the time of independence the major literary critics active in the field were not more than a dozen or score, but by the beginning of the 21st century, virtually every reader seems to have graduated into a potential critic. Traditional poetics, western literary theories, new-fangled ideas, apart from the hold of various ideologies, not necessarily political, inspire practically every reader to read book reviews and even books of literary criticism. It is now not the idle pastime of scholars, but the concerned loud and not so loud thinking of every teacher, student, journalist, visitor to the library or bookshop. Leading publishers are now interested in bringing out collections of literary essays or even whole books of literary criticism. However, for the proper presentation of the subject in the present historical account, it may be necessary to identify the most important of the critics, without meaning to ignore the others, including the ever active younger critics.

As in the case of the other genres, in literary criticism too there was the inevitable overlap of tendencies and personalities. Kuttikrishna Marar and Joseph Mundassery were the major figures, Marar concentrating on poetry, Mundassery focusing attention on fiction and not only poetry. In their wake, K. Bhaskaran Nair, K.M. George, C.J. Thomas, S. Guptan Nair, Sukumar Azhicode, P.K. Balakrishnan, M.K. Sanoo, M. Leelavathy, K.S. Narayana Pillai, K.P. Appan, K.P. Sankaran, M. Thomas Mathew, V. Rajakrishnan and others have enlarged the concerns of the critic and rectified the imbalance and brought other forms of literature within the purview of criticism. M.P. Paul was mainly a critic of fiction, and his two books on the novel and the short story, for all their obvious limitations, were very timely publications. He commanded special respect among the creative writers of the period and was therefore quite influential.

The growth of fiction, both the novel and the short story, and their increasing popularity among the students as well as the general reading public, and the opportunity to publish writings on so-called creative writing gave an unprecedented opportunity for budding critics to set forth on their grand journey. Many not only ventured to do so, but also stayed on as full-time critics. Literary criticism may be said to have become a profession for many, and this promoted the professionalism of the critical entrepreneurs. Academic scholarship flourished alongside freelance criticism, and both filled a gap that was there in the earlier period. The institution of awards and prizes at the national and state levels provided occasion for considering the merits and defects of published works. K. Bhaskaran Nair (1913-82), although a scientist by training, wrote on criticism and poetics: among his works are *Kalayum Kaalavum* (Art and Life) and *Deivaneetikku Dakshinyamilla* (Divine Justice has no Compunction). K.M. George (1914-2002) is remembered as the champion of comparative literary studies and the works he has edited, such as encyclopedias, anthologies, histories of literature etc. are important sources for literary interpretation. He is also the author of critical monographs on several Malayalam authors. M.P. Sankunni Nair (b.1917), who is a scholar critic, well versed in Sanskrit, Tamil and Malayalam, has authored *Chhatravum Chaamaravum* and

Natyamandapam. C.J. Thomas (1918-60), more famous as a playwright, was a good critic of not only theatre and drama, but also of society and life. Like him, M. Govindan was a seminal thinker and had a profound impact on the writers of his time. His *Anveshanathinte Aarambham* was an epoch-making treatise on the spirit of enlightened enquiry into man's contemporary estate. S. Guptan Nair (b. 1919) brings the qualities of a responsible teacher to his practice of criticism: well-informed, balanced and judicious, as in *Samalochana*. K. Raghavan Pillai (1920-87), knowledgeable in western and Sanskrit criticism, was an academic who edited several ancient classics.

M. Krishnan Nair (b. 1923) through his literary column *Sahityavaraphalam* has introduced a number of distinguished foreign writers to the reading public in Kerala. Sukumar Azhicode (b.1926), famous as an orator and critic of criticism, specializes in both mandana vimarsham and khandana vimarsham: his early book *Asante Sitakavyam* (Asan's poem on Sita) is a good example of the former, while his *G. Sankara Kurup Vimarsikkappedunnu* (A. Critique of G. Sankara Kurup) is an example of the latter. P.K. Balakrishnan (1925-91) has written a number of seminal critical works on fiction (*Novel: Siddhiyum Sadhanayum*), on poetry (*Kavyakala Kumaran Asanilude*) and on society (*Jathivyavasththiyum Keralacharithravum*). Thayatt Sankaran (1926-85) and P. Govinda Pillai (b. 1926) may come under the category of social thinkers and culture critics. M.K. Sanoo (b. 1928) has several critical works to his credit, especially biographical studies of authors like Changampuzha, M. Govindan, Sahodaran Ayyappan and Shri Narayana Guru. M. Leelavathy (b. 1929), perhaps the best known woman critic in Malayalam, is a prolific writer of books such as *Varnaraji, Kavitayum Sastravum* (Poetry and Science), *Kavitadhwani*, and a comprehensive history of Malayalam poetry. M.R. Chandrasekharan (b. 1929) is well known as the author of *Nirupakante Rajyabharam* (The Critic's Governance). M. Achuthan (b. 1930) is the author of *Pashchathya Sahitya Darshanam* (Western Literary View) and *Cherukatha: Innale, Innu* (The Short Story: Yesterday, Today). K.M. Tharakan (1930-2003) was a critic quite familiar with western rhetoric and poetics, and has written perceptively on Malayalam fiction and poetry.

Slightly younger to these but equally forceful is K.P. Appan (b. 1936), a theorist and practical critic, with concepts such as thiraskaram, kalaham, kshobham, kalapam, etc. as basic to the function of criticism in our time, who has written a number of books, mainly commenting on contemporary Malayalam fiction, and explaining post-modernism. He has been an important influence on the thinking of younger writers. Likewise M. Gangadharan and M. Thomas Mathew, the former well anchored in social history and the latter in aesthetics, have analyzed literary and socio-cultural issues that have affected our life and thought. K. Venu (b.1945), with such books as *Prapanchavum Manushyanum*, helped to deepen our awareness of man and nature. Ayyappa Paniker and Sachidanandan are creative writers who have brought to bear on criticism ideas gleaned from literary creation. K.P. Sankaran brings out the nuances of literary expression with an innate understanding of poetry and life. Chathanath Achyuthanunni is a classicist who understands what modern western criticism has added to our traditional wisdom. M.M. Basheer (1940) has done a monumental scholarly work on Kumaran Asan's poetic craft. R. Viswanathan (1942-2005) is the author of *Anvayam*, a work of rare critical insight. D. Benjamin (1948) comments on literary works from an aesthetic humanist point of view.

V. Rajakrishnan and Narendra Prasad are able to look at the many facets of contemporary Malayalam literature and culture with fresh insights received from western sources. B. Rajeevan is able to bring to bear on his criticism the impact of socio-political thought. Desamangalam Ramakrishnan is again a poet who can use the awareness of linguistics as a key to the interpretation of poetry. Asha Menon, V.C. Sreejan and Prasannarajan are among the large number of interpretive critics with sharp perceptions. P.P. Raveendran extends the frontiers of conventional literary criticism to cover such new developments as cultural studies. Ezhumattoor Rajaraja Varma (b. 1953) has an illuminating study of *Vilapakavya-prasthanam* (The Elegy), apart from a biography of N. Krishna Pillai. Balachandran Vadakkedath (b. 1954), K.S. Ravikumar (b.1957), S. Rajasekharan, E.D. Rajagopalan, N. Sasidharan, C.R. Prasad, P.K. Rajasekharan etc are among the important

voices in criticism as in poetry, novel and short story, the number of young enthusiasts in the field of criticism is also very large and the new generation is gifted with a triple insight, combining the essence of ancient Sanskrit and Dravidian lore with new western thinking and their own personal preoccupations with current literary affairs. Academic scholarship is also flourishing as a small scale industry in the form of doctoral theses from the different universities, some of them have a genuine critical importance.

General Literature

The past fifty years have seen an upward trend not only in all branches of literature, but also in what makes literature possible. Apart from poetry, drama, fiction and criticism, innumerable books have been published on general knowledge, science, particularly information technology, law, areas of social concern like feminism, dalit awareness, tribal culture, folklore and what not. There is hardly any subject of general human interest on which some books have not been produced. Biographies and autobiographies have had a boom: various national and state leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi, C. Kesavan, E.M.S Nambudiripad, K. Ayyappan, Chattampi Swamikal, Sri Narayana Guru, major writers like Asan, Vallathol, Changampuzha, Edasseri Govindan Nair, M. Govindan, Panampilli Govinda Menon, Suranad Kunjan Pillai, etc. Autobiographical literature is also growing, thanks to the efforts of authors like K.P. Kesava Menon, A.K. Gopalan, C. Kesavan, Pavanan, Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, Thikkodiyar, Cherukad, Guptan Nair, etc. Books on scientific subjects have registered a phenomenal increase. A similar growth may be perceived in the field of children's literature for all age groups from nursery songs onwards.

Encyclopedias are being brought out by both government and private agencies. The government is bringing out even an encyclopedia of world literature. The cultural wings of the government are bringing out books and journals of special interest to those interested in literature, visual arts, theatre, folklore, literacy etc. In keeping with the explosion in general knowledge, there has been corresponding explosion in the production of books on every

subject. Politics and economics vie with sociology and history among works on general information.

Well-informed travel literature based on first-hand experience is another field of growing interest. S.K. Pottekkatt has laid strong foundations for travelogue in Malayalam, followed by many others. K.V. Surendranath wrote about his travel to Kailas in his book *Lokathinte Mukalthattil* (On the Top of the World). M.P. Virendra Kumar has written about travels to countries rarely visited by professional travel-mongers, although he has also authored other works like *Buddhante Chiri* (Buddhan's Smile) and *Ramante Dukkham* (Rama's Sorrow). The literature of humour has also found a large number of patrons and practitioners in the tradition of E.V. Krishna Pillai and Sanjayan: they include P.K. Rajaraja Varma, M.N. Govindan Nair, Anandakuttan Nair, Narayanan Nair, Velloor Krishnankutty, Subbiah Pillai, K.S. Krishnan, Sukumar, Jose Panachipuram, etc. Translations have always furthered the progress of Malayalam language and literature, and the modern period has borne witness to the translation of classics from world languages like Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, Dante's Divine Comedy, Shakespeare's Complete Works, Sherlock Holmes complete, and Kahlil Gibran complete, so many Latin American authors, works from other Indian languages, world fiction, world poetry and world drama: all the doors are always kept open. Little by little, Malayalam literature also gets translated into other languages, although only in trickles, compared to what we get translated into Malayalam. There are a few instances of non-Malayalis translating Malayalam literary works into other languages like English, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, etc. Before independence these were few and far between, but during the past fifty years the number has been increasing. Apart from translations sponsored by National Book Trust and Sahitya Akademis, individuals also have taken the initiative. R.E. Asher has translated Thakazhi and Basheer directly from Malayalam into English, Reade Wood Ezhuthacchan's *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Harinama Kirtana*, etc. into English, Rati Saxena Balamani Amma's *Naivedyam*, Thakazhi's *Kayar* (abridged) and short stories, Karoor's short stories, as well as poems by Sachidanandan and Ayyappa Paniker, etc. into Hindi, Sudhamshu Chaturvedi into Hindi, Nileena Abraham

into Bengali, C. Raghavan into Kannada, Neela Padmanabhan into Tamil, Kurinchevelan into Tamil and others.

Malayali authors also write in English, especially on non-literary topics (as there were people in the past who used to write in Sanskrit on literary and nonliterary themes), but there are a few who write poetry and fiction in other languages: Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Jayashri Mishra, and others, on whom Malayalis can have a clandestine claim, for theirs is a composite and cosmopolitan culture, and the exodus every year of literate population to other parts of the world is on the increase from God's own country, where in the old days people from other lands used to come and settle down and were received with warmth and affection. In the years to come this cosmopolitanism is likely to develop further. Consistent with the international presence of the Malayalis, their literature is also likely to be more and more inclusive and open to influences from abroad. But no culture can afford to forget or neglect its roots. It is to be hoped that every contact with the outside world will further strengthen the roots, thereby promoting the general growth.

The New Century

As we greet the new century, the turbulence and anxieties faced by people all over the world seem to be on the increase. We may have learned to look at life and literature from a global angle, but a small population inhabiting a small part of the earth with a little known language has its own share of aspirations and difficulties. To be part of a larger system and yet to maintain its own individuality and local identity in this highly competitive set up is a major problem affecting the life of every serious writer. The rapid changes taking place in every field of life in our time – family, economy, education, large scale migration, cultural encounters and so forth – leave their mark on the tune and temper of literature, and Malayalam literature of the 21st century, now being shaped by the creative favour of our young writers, will be an adequate record of all these developments along with their own anguish and uncertainties. Our readers and critics eagerly look forward to their new generation of writers to redefine the life and literature of the new century, which they have started doing in right earnest.

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